MA PETTENGILL

HARRY LEON WILSON

Marguerite

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BY

HARRY LEON WILSON

Author of
"Bunker Bean," "Ruggles of Red Gap,"
"Somewhere in Red Gap," Etc.

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TO
WILLIAM EUGENE LEWIS

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MA PETTENGILL

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I

MA PETTENGILL AND THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

FROM the Arrowhead corrals I strolled up the poplar-bordered lane that leads past the bunk house to the castle of the ranch's chatelaine. It was a still Sunday afternoon—the placid interlude, on a day of rest, between the chores of the morning and those of evening. But the calm was for the ear alone. To the eye certain activities, silent but swift, were under way. On the shaded side piazza of the ranch house I could discern my hostess, Mrs. Lysander John Pettengill; she sat erect, even in a rocking-chair, and knitted. On the kitchen steps, full in the westering sun, sat the Chinese chef of the Arrowhead, and knitted —a yellow, smoothly running automaton. On a shaded bench by the spring house, a plaid golfing cap pushed back from one-half the amazing area of his bare pate, sat the aged chore-boy, Boogles, and knitted. The ranch was on a war basis.

And more: As I came abreast of the bunk house the Sabbath calm was punctured by the tart and careless speech of Sandy Sawtelle, a top rider of the Arrowhead, for he, too, was knitting, or had been. On a stool outside the doorway he held up an unfinished thing before his grieved eyes and devoutly wished it in the place of punishment of the wicked dead. The sincere passion

of his tones not only arrested my steps but lured through the open doorway the languorous and yawning Buck Devine, who hung over the worker with disrespectful attention. I joined the pair. To Buck's query, voiced in a key of feigned mirth, Sandy said with simple dignity that it was going to be a darned good sweater for the boys in the trenches. Mr. Devine offered to bet his head that it wasn't going to be anything at all—at least nothing any one would want round a trench. Mr. Sawtelle ignored the wager and asked me if I knew how to do this here, now, casting off. I did not.

"I better sneak round and ask the Chink," said Sandy. "He's the star knitter on the place."

We walked on together, seemingly deaf to certain laboured pleasantries of Mr. Devine concerning a red-headed cow-puncher that had got rejected for fighting because his feet was flat and would now most likely get rejected for knitting because his head was flat. By way of covering the hearty laughter of Mr. Devine at his own wit I asked why Sandy should not consult his employer rather than her cook.

With his ball of brown wool, his needles and his work carried tenderly before him Sandy explained, with some embarrassment as it seemed, that the madam was a good knitter, all right, all right, but she was an awful bitter-spoken lady when any little thing about the place didn't go just right, making a mountain out of a mole hill, and crying over spilt milk, and always coming back to the same old subject, and so forth, till you'd think she couldn't talk about anything else, and had one foot in the poorhouse, and couldn't take a joke, and all like that. I could believe it or not, but that was the simple facts of the matter when all was said and done. And the Chink was only too glad to show off how smart he was with a pair of needles.

This not only explained nothing but suggested that there might indeed be something to explain. And it was Sandy's employer after all who resolved his woolen difficulty. She called to him as he would have left me for the path to the kitchen door:

"You bring that right here!"

It was the tone of one born to command, and once was enough. Sandy brought it right there, though going rather too much like a martyr to the stake, I thought; for surely it was not shameful that he should prove inept in the new craft.

Nor was there aught but genial kindness in the lady's reception of him. Ma Pettengill, arrayed in Sabbath bravery of apparel, as of a débutante at a summer hotel where the rates are exorbitant, instantly laid by her own knitting and questioned him soothingly. It seemed to be a simple difficulty. Sandy had reached the point where a sweater must have a neck, and had forgotten his instructions. Cordially the woman aided him to subtract fourteen from two hundred and sixty-two and then to ascertain that one hundred and twenty-four would be precisely half of the remainder. It was all being done, as I have remarked, with the gentlest considering kindness, with no hint of that bitterness which the neophyte had shown himself to be fearing in the lady. Was she not kindness itself? Was she not, in truth, just a shade too kind? Surely there was a purr to her voice, odd, unwonted; and surely her pupil already cringed under a lash that impended.

Yet this visible strain, it seemed, had not to do with knitted garments. Ma Pettengill praised the knitting of Sandy; praised it to me and praised it to him. Of course her remark that he seemed to be a born knitter and ought to devote his whole time to it might have seemed invidious to a sensitive cowman, yet it was ut-

tered with flawless geniality. But when Sandy, being set right, would have taken his work and retired, as was plainly his eager wish, his mentor said she would knit two of the new short rows herself, just to make sure. And while she knitted these two rows she talked. She knitted them quickly, though the time must have seemed to Sandy much longer than it was.

"Here stands the greatest original humorist in Kulanche County," said the lady, with no longer a purring note in her voice. She boomed the announcement. Sandy, drooping above her, painfully wore the affectation of counting each stitch of the flashing needles. "And practical jokes—my sakes alive! He can think of the funniest jokes to put up on poor, unsuspecting people! Yes, sir; got a genuis for it. And witty! Of course it ain't just what he says that's so funny—it's the noisy way he says it.

"And you wouldn't think it to look at him, but he's one of these here financial magnets, too. Oh, yes, indeed! Send him out with a hatful of ten-dollar bills any day and he won't let one of 'em go for a cent under six dollars, not if buyers is plenty—he's just that keen and avaricious. That's his way. Never trained for it, either; just took it up natural."

With drawn and ashen face Mr. Sawtelle received back his knitting. His pose was to appear vastly preoccupied and deaf to insult. He was still counting stitches as he turned away and clattered down the steps.

"Say!" called his employer. Sandy turned.

"Yes, ma'am!"

"You seen the party that stopped here this morning in that big, pompous touring car?"

"No, ma'am!"

"They was after mules."

"Yes, ma'am!"

"They offered me five hundred dollars a span for mine."

"No, ma'am—I mean, yes, ma'am!"

"That's all. I thought you'd rejoice to know it." The lady turned to me as if Mr. Sawtelle had left us. "Yes, sir; he'd make you die laughing with some of his pranks, that madcap would. I tell you, when he begins cutting up——"

But Mr. Sawtelle was leaving us rapidly. His figure seemed to be drawn in, as if he would appear smaller to us. Ma Pettengill seized her own knitting once more, stared grimly at it, then stared grimly down at the bunk house, within which her victim had vanished. A moment later she was pouring tobacco from a cloth sack into a brown cigarette paper. She drew the string of the sack—one end between her teeth—rolled the cigarette with one swift motion and, as she waited the blaze of her match, remarked that they had found a substitute for everything but the mule. The cigarette lighted, she burned at least a third of its length in one vast inhalation, which presently caused twin jets of smoke to issue from the rather widely separated corners of a generous mouth. Upon which she remarked that old Safety First Timmins was a game winner, about the gamest winner she'd ever lost to.

Three other mighty inhalations and the cigarette was done. Again she took up the knitting, pausing for but one brief speech before the needles began their shrewd play. This concerned the whale. She said the whale was the noblest beast left to us in all the animal kingdom and would vanish like the buffalo if treated as food. She said it was shameful to reduce this majestic creature of the deep to the dimensions of a chafing dish and a three-cornered slice of toast. Then she knitted.

She had left numerous openings; some humorous em-

prise of Sandy Sawtelle, presumably distressing; the gameness of one Timmins as a winner; the whale as a food animal; the spectacular price of mules broken to harness. Rather than choose blindly among them I spoke of my day's fishing. Departing at sunrise I had come in with a bounteous burden of rainbow trout, which I now said would prove no mean substitute for meat at the evening meal.

Then, as she grimly knitted, Ma Pettengill discoursed of other boasted substitutes for meat, none of which pleased her. Hogs and sheep were other substitutes, there being but one genuine meat, to wit, Beef. Take hogs; mean, unsociable animals, each hog going off by himself, cursing and swearing every step of the way. Had I ever seen a hog that thought any other hog was good enough to associate with him? No, I hadn't; nor nobody else. A good thing hogs couldn't know their present price. Stuck up enough already! And sheep? Silly. No minds of their own. Let one die and all the rest think they got to die also. Do it too. No brain. Of course the price tempted a lot of moral defectives to raise 'em, but when you reflected that you had to go afoot, with a dog that was smarter than any man at it, and a flea-bitten burro for your mess wagon—not for her. Give her a business where you could set on a horse. Yes, sir; people would get back to Nature and raise beef after the world had been made safe once more for a healthy appetite. This here craze for substitutes would die out. You couldn't tell her there was any great future for the canned jack-rabbit business, for instance—just a fad; and whales the same. She knew and I knew that a whale was too big to eat. People couldn't get any real feeling for it, and not a chance on earth to breed 'em up and improve the flesh. Wasn't that the truth? And these here diet experts, with their

everlasting talk about carbos and hydrates, were they doing a thing but simply taking all the romance out of food? No, they were not. Of course honest fish, like trout, were all right if a body was sick or not hungry or something.

Trout reminded her of something, and here again the baleful tooth of calumny fleshed itself in the fair repute of one Timmins. She described him as "a strange growth named Timmins, that has the Lazy 8 Ranch over on the next creek and wears kind of aimless whiskers all over his face till you'd think he had a gas mask on." She talked freely of him.

"You know what he does when he wants a mess of trout? Takes one of these old-fashioned beer bottles with patent stoppers, fills it up with unslaked lime, pours in a little water, stops it up, drops it in a likely looking trout pool, and in one minute it explodes as good as something made by a Russian patriot; all the trout in the pool are knocked out and float on the surface, where this old highbinder gathers 'em in. He's a regular efficiency expert in sport. Take fall and spring, when the wild geese come through, he'll soak grain in alcohol and put it out for 'em over on the big marsh. First thing you know he'll have a drunken old goose by the legs, all maudlin and helpless. Puts him in a coop till he sobers up, then butchers him.

"Such is Safety First: never been known to take a chance yet. Why, say, a year ago when he sold off his wool there was a piece in the county paper about him getting eighteen thousand dollars for it; so naturally there was a man that said he was a well-known capitalist come up from San Francisco to sell him some stock in a rubber company. Safety admits he has the money and he goes down to the big city for a week at the capitalist's expense, seeing the town's night life and the

blue-print maps and the engraved stock and samples of the rubber and the capitalist's picture under a magnificent rubber tree in South America, and he's lodged in a silk boudoir at the best hotel and wined and dined very deleteriously and everything is agreed to. And the night before he's going to put his eighteen thousand into this lovely rubber stock that will net him two hundred per cent. at the very lowest, on the capitalist's word of honour, what does he do but sneak out and take the train for home on his return ticket that he'd made the capitalist buy him.

"Ever talk to one of these rich capitalists that has rubber stock for sale in South America or a self-starting banana orchard? You know how good they are. You're certainly entitled to anything of your own that you've kept after they get through with you. And would you think that this poor, simple-minded old rancher would be any match for their wiles? But if you knew he had been a match and had nicked 'em for at least three hundred dollars, would you still think something malignant might be put over on him by a mere scrub buckeroo named Sandy Sawtelle, that never made a cent in his life except by the most degrading manual labour? No, you wouldn't. No fair-minded judge of criminals would.

"But I admit I had a weak moment. Yes, sir; for a brief spell I was all too human. Or I guess what it was. I was all blinded up with immoral designs, this here snake-blooded Timmins having put things over on me in stock deals from time to time till I'd got to lying awake nights thinking how I could make a believer of him. I wanted him to know there is a God, even if it hadn't ever seemed so to him.

"Of course I knew it would have to be some high-grade felony, he being proof against common depreda-

tions. Well, then, along come this Sunday paper, with two whole pages telling about how the meat of the common whale will win the war, with a picture of a whale having dotted lines showing how to butcher it, and recipes for whale patties, and so forth. And next comes the circus to Red Gap, with old Pete, the Indian, going down to it and getting crazy about elephants. And so that was how it happened."

The lady now knitted in silence, appearing to believe that all had been told.

I waited a decent interval, then said I was glad indeed to know how it had all happened; that it was a great help to know how it had happened, even if I must remain forever ignorant of what it was that had happened. Of course I couldn't expect to be told that.

It merely brought more about mules. Five hundred dollars a span for mules looked good until you remembered that you needed 'em worse than the other party did. She had to keep her twenty span of old reliables because, what with the sailors and section hands you got nowadays to do your haying, you had to have tame mules. Give 'em any other kind and they'd desert the ship the minute a team started to run. It cost too much for wagon repairs.

Silence again.

I now said I had, it was true, heard much low neighbourhood scandal about the Timmins man, but that I had learned not to believe all I heard about people; there was too much prejudice in the world, and at least two sides to every question.

This merely evoked the item that Timmins had bought him a thrift stamp on the sole ground that it had such a pretty name; then came the wish that she might have seen him dining in public at that rich hotel where the capitalist paid the bills.

She thought people must have been startled by some of his actions.

"Yes, sir; that old outlaw will eat soup or any soft food with almost no strategy at all."

As we seemed to be getting nowhere I meanly rolled the lady a cigarette. She hates to stop knitting to roll one, but she will stop to light it.

She stopped now, and as I held the match for her I said quite frankly that it had become necessary for me to be told the whole thing from start to finish. She said she had told me everything—and believed it—but would go over it again if I didn't understand. Though not always starting at command, the lady has really a full habit of speech.

I told you about whales, didn t I? Whales started it—whales for table use. It come in the Sunday paper —with the picture of a handsome whale and the picture of a French cook kissing his fingers over the way he has cooked some of it; and the picture of a pleased young couple eating whale in a swell restaurant; and the picture of a fair young bride in her kitchenette cutting up three cents' worth of whale meat into a chafing dish and saying how glad she was to have something tasty and cheap for dearie's lunch; and the picture of a poor labouring man being told by someone down in Washington, D. C., that's making a dollar a year, that a nickel's worth of prime whale meat has more actual nourishment than a dollar's worth of porterhouse steak; and so on, till you'd think the world's food troubles was going to be settled in jig time; all people had to do was to go out and get a good eating whale and salt down the side meat and smoke the shoulders and grind up some sausage and be fixed for the winter, with plenty to send a mess round to the neighbours now and then.

And knocking beef, you understand, till you'd think no one but criminals and idiots would ever touch a real steak again, on account of its being so poor in food values, like this Washington scientist says that gets a dollar a year salary and earns every cent of it. It made me mad, the slanderous things they said about beef; but I read the piece over pretty carefully and I really couldn't see where the whale was going to put me out of business, at least for a couple years yet. It looked like I'd have time, anyway, to make a clean-up before you'd be able to go into any butcher shop and get a rib roast of young whale for six cents, with a bushel or two of scraps thrown in for the dog.

Then this Sunday paper goes out to the bunk house and the boys find the whale piece and get excited about it. Looks like if it's true that most of 'em will be driving ice wagons or something for a living. They want me to send down for a mess of whale meat so they can see if it tastes like regular food. They don't hardly believe these pictures where people dressed up like they had money are going into spasms of delight about it. Still, they don't know—poor credulous dubs! They think things you see in a Sunday paper might be true now and then, even if it is most always a pack of lies thought up by dissipated newspaper men.

I tell 'em they can send for a whole whale if they want to pay for it, but none of my money goes that way so long as stall-fed beef retains its present flavour; and furthermore I expect to be doing business right here for years after the whale fad has died out—doing the best I can with about ten silly cowhands taking the rest cure at my expense the minute I step off the place. I said there was no doubt they should all be added to the ranks of the unemployed that very minute—but due to other well-known causes than the wiping out of the cattle in-

dustry by cold whale hash in jelly, which happened to be the dish this French chef was going crazy over.

They chewed over that pointed information for a while, then they got to making each other bets of a thousand dollars about what whale meat would taste like; whether whale liver and bacon could be told from natural liver and bacon, and whether whale steak would probably taste like catfish or mebbe more like mud turtle. Sandy Sawtelle, who always knows everything by divine right, like you might say, he says in superior tones that it won't taste like either one but has a flavour all its own, which even he can't describe, though it will be something like the meat of the wild sea cow, which roams the ocean in vast herds off the coast of Florida.

Then they consider the question of a whale round-up in an expert manner. It don't look none too good, going out on rodeo in water about three miles too deep for wading, though the idea of lass'ing a whale calf and branding it does hold a certain fascination. Sandy says it would be the only livestock business on earth where you don't always have to be fearing a dry season; and Buck Devine says that's so, and likewise the range is practically unlimited, as any one can see from a good map, and wouldn't it be fine riding herd in a steam yacht with a high-class bartender handy, instead of on a so-and-so cayuse that was liable any minute to trade ends and pour you out of the saddle on to your lame shoulder.

They'd got to kidding about it by this time, when who should ride up but old Safety First Timmins. They spring the food whale on Safety with much flourish. They show him the pictures and quote prices on the hoof—which are low, but look what even a runt of a yearling whale that was calved late in the fall would weigh on the scales!—and no worry about fences or free range or winter feeding or water holes; nothing to do

but ride round on your private steamboat with a good orchestra, and a chance to be dissolute and count your money. And look what a snap the pioneers will have with all the mavericks; probably not a single whale in the ocean yet branded! And does Timmins want to throw in with us? If he does mebbe they can fix up a deal with me because I want a good business man at the head of the new outfit.

But Safety says right off quick that it's all a pack of nonsense. He says it's the mad dream of a visionary or feeble-minded person. He don't deny there would be money in whales if they could be handled, but you couldn't handle anything that had the whole ocean to swim in that covers three quarters of the earth's surface, as he has often read. And how would you get a branding iron on a whale, and what good would it do you? He'd beat it out for Europe. He said they was foolish to think whales would stay in a herd, and he guessed I'd been talking just to hear myself talk, or more likely I'd been kidding 'em to get a good laugh.

Sandy says: "Well, I wasn't going to tell you at first, but I guess it'll be safe with you, you being a good friend of the Arrowhead, only don't let it go no farther; but the fact is the boss is negotiating for the whale privilege in Great Salt Lake. Yes, sir, she's bribing the Utah legislature this very minute to let the bill go through! And I guess that don't look much like kidding. As soon as the governor has signed the bill she'll put in a couple of good three-year-old bull whales and a nice little herd of heifers and have the world's meat supply at her finger ends in less than five years—just killing off the yearling steers."

Safety looks a bit startled at this, and Sandy goes on to say that though whale meat is now but a fad of the idle rich it's bound to be the meat of rich and poor alike

in future. He'd bet a thousand dollars to a dime that by the time the next war come along the first thing they'd do would be to establish a whaleless day. He said whale meat was just that good.

Safety chewed his gum quite a time on this—he says if a man chews gum he won't ruin himself in pocket for tobacco—and he read the whale article over carefully and looked at the pictures again, but he still said it didn't sound to him like a legitimate business enterprise. He said for one thing there'd be trouble shipping the original herd up to Salt Lake. Sandy said it was true; there would be the initial expense of loading on to flat cars, and a couple of tunnels would have to be widened so the bulls wouldn't be rasped going through, but that I have already taken this up with the railroad company.

Safety says that may all be true, but, mark his words, the minute my herd gets into inland waters it will develop some kind of disease like anthrax or blackleg, and the whole bunch will die on me. Sandy says it will be a simple matter to vaccinate, because the animals will be as affectionate as kittens by that time through having been kindly handled, which is all a whale needs. He says they really got a very social nature and are loyal unto death. Once a whale is your friend, he says, it's for life, rain or shine, just so long as you treat him square. Even do a whale a favour just once and he'll remember your face, make no difference if it's fifty years; though being the same, it is true, in his hatreds, because a whale never forgives an injury. A sailor he happens to know once give a whale he had made friends with a chew of tobacco just for a joke and the animal got into an awful rage and tried to tear the ship down to get at him, and then he followed the ship all over the world waiting for this sailor to fall off or get wrecked or

something, till finally the hunted man got so nervous he quit the sea and is now running a news stand in Seattle, if Safety don't believe it. It just goes to show that a whale as long as you're square with him is superior in mind and morals to a steer, which ain't got sense enough to know friend from foe.

Safety still shakes his head. He says "safe and sane" has been his motto throughout a long and busy life and this here proposition don't sound like neither one to him. The boys tell him he's missing a good thing by not throwing in with us. They say I'm giving 'em each a big block of stock, paid up and non-assessable, and they don't want him to come round later when they're rolling in wealth and ask why they didn't give him a chance too.

"I can just hear you talk," said Sandy. "You'll be saying: 'I knew that whole fool bunch when not one ever had a dollar he could call his own the day after he was paid off, and now look at 'em—throwing their hundreds of thousands right and left; houses with pianos in every room; new boots every week; silver-mounted saddles at a thousand each; choice wines, liquors, and cigars; private taxicabs; and Alexander J. Sawtelle, the wealthy banker, being elected to Congress by an overwhelming majority!' That's the way you'll be talking," said Sandy, "with regret eating into your vitals like some horrible acid that is fatal to man and beast."

Safety says he thinks they're all plumb crazy, and a fool and his money is soon parted—this being a saying he must have learned at the age of three and has never forgotten a word of—and he comes up to the house to see me. Mebbe he wanted to find out if I had really lost my mind, but he said nothing about whales. Just set round and talked the usual hard luck. Been in the stock business thirty years and never had a good year

yet. Nothing left of his cattle but the running gear; and his land so poor you couldn't even raise a row on it unless you went there mad; and why he keeps on struggling in the bitter clutch of misfortune he don't know. But I always know why he keeps on struggling. Money! Nothing but money. So when he got through mourning over his ruined fortunes, and feebly said something about taking some mules off my hands at a fair price, I shut him off firmly. Whenever that old crook talks about taking anything off your hands he's plotting as near highway robbery as they'll let him stay out of jail for. He was sad when I refused two hundred and fifty dollars a span for my best mules.

He went off shaking his head like he hadn't expected such inhumanity from an old friend and neighbour to one who through hard luck was now down and out.

Well, I hear no more about whales; but a circus is coming to Red Gap and old Pete, the Indian, says he must go down to it, his mind being inflamed by some incredible posters pasted over the blacksmith shop at Kulanche. He says he's a very old man and can't be with us long, and when he does take the one-way trail he wants to be able to tell his friends on the other side all about the strange animals that they never had a chance to see. The old pagan was so excited about it I let him go. And he was still more excited when he got back two days later. Yes, sir; he'd found a way to fortune.

He said I'd sure think he was a liar with a crooked tongue and a false heart, but they had an animal at that circus as big as our biggest covered mess wagon and it would weigh as much as the six biggest steers I ever shipped. It has a nose about five feet long—he was sure I wouldn't believe this part—that it fed itself with, and it carried so much meat that just one ham would

keep a family like Pete's going all winter. He said of course I would think he was a liar, but I could write down to Red Gap to a lawyer, and the lawyer would get plenty of people to swear to it right in the courthouse. And so now I must hurry up and stock the place with these animals and have more meat than anybody in the world and get rich pretty quick. Forty times he stretched his arms to show me how big one of these hams would be, and he said the best part was that this animal hardly ate anything at all but a little popcorn and a few peanuts. Hadn't he watched it for hours? And if I didn't hurry others would get the idea and run prices up.

I guess Pete's commercial mind must of been engaged by hearing the boys talk about whales. He hadn't held with the whale proposition, not for a minute, after he learned they live in the ocean. He once had a good look at the ocean and he promptly said "Too much water!" But here was a land animal packing nearly as much meat as a whale, eating almost nothing, and as tame as a puppy. "I think, 'Injun how you smart!'" he says when he got through telling me all this in a very secret and important way.

I told him he was very smart indeed and ought to have a job with the Government at a dollar a year telling people to quit beef meat for the elephant. I said I was much obliged for the tip and if I ever got to going good in elephants I'd see he had a critter of his own to butcher every fall. So Pete went out with all his excitement and told the boys how I was going to stock the ranch with these new animals which was better than whales because you wouldn't have to get your feet wet. The boys made much of it right off.

In no time at all they had all the white-faces sold off and vast herds of pure-bred elephants roaming over the ranch with the Arrowhead brand on 'em. Down on the

flat lands they had waving fields of popcorn and up above here they had a thousand acres of ripening peanuts; and Sandy Sawtelle, the king of the humourists, he hit on another idea that would bring in fifty thousand dollars a year just on the side. He said if a crowd come along to a ranch and bought the rancher's own hay for the sake of feeding it to his own steers they would be thought weak-minded. Not so with elephants. He said people would come from far and near and bring their little ones to buy our own peanuts and popcorn to feed our own elephants. All we needed to do was put the stuff up in sacks at a nickel a throw. He said of course the novelty might die out in time, but if he could only get the peanut-and-popcorn concession for the first three years that would be all he'd want for his simple needs of living in a swell marble house in Spokane, with a private saloon and hired help to bring him his breakfast in bed and put on another record and minister to his lightest whim. Buck Devine said he'd be able to throw his own good money right and left if he could get the ivory privilege, which is made from the horns of the elephant and is used for many useful purposes; and one of the other boys says they'll develop a good milk strain and get a dairy herd, because the milk of this noble animal ought to be fine for prize fighters and piano movers.

In about ten minutes they was doing quite a business for old Pete's benefit, and Pete very earnest about it. He says I've promised him a young animal to butcher every fall, and they tell him there ain't no meat so good as a prime young popcorn-fed elephant, and he'll certainly live high. And just then up rides old Safety First again. So they get silent and mysterious all at once and warn Pete, so Safety will hear it, not to say a word to any one. Pete looks secretiveand hostile at the

visitor and goes back to his woodpile. Safety naturally says what fool thing have they got into their heads now, and he supposes it's some more of that whale nonsense.

The boys clam up. They say this is nothing like whales, but a dry-land proposition too important to talk about; that I've sworn everyone to secrecy, but he'll see soon enough what it is when the big money begins to roll in. They don't mind telling him it's an African proposition of new and nourishing food, a regular godsend to the human race, but they got to keep quiet until I get my options bought up so I'll have the cream of the business.

Safety sniffs in a baffled manner and tries to worm out a hint, but they say it's a thing would go like wildfire once it got known, being so much tastier than whale meat and easier to handle, and eating almost nothing.

"Whales was pretty good," says Sandy; "but since the boss got a line on this other animal she's disposed of her whale interests for seventy-three thousand dollars."

Buck Devine says I showed him the check, that come in yesterday's mail, and let him hold it a minute so he could say he once held seventy-three thousand dollars in his hand just like that. And the money was to be put into this new business, with the boys being let in on the ground floor, like they had been with the whales. Sandy says that in probably a year from now, or eighteen months at the most, he won't be a thing but a dissipated millionaire. Nothing but that!

Safety is peculiar in his mind. If you told him you found a million gold dollars up in the top of that jack pine he wouldn't believe it, yet still and all he'd get a real thrill out of it. He certainly does cherish money. The very notion of it is romantic to him. And he must of been thrilled now. He hung round, listening keenly while the boys squandered their vast wealth in various

reprehensible ways, trying to get some idea about the new animal. Finally he sniffed some more, and they was all crazy as loons, and went off. But where does he go but over to old Pete at the woodpile and keeps him from his work for ten minutes trying to get the new animal's name out of Pete. But he can't trap the redman into any admissions. All he can find out is that Pete is serious and excited.

Then he come up to ask me once more if he couldn't take some mules off my hands. He found out quick and short that he couldn't. Still he hung round, talking nonsense as far as I could make out, because I hadn't yet been let in on the new elephant proposition. He says he hears I'm taking up a new line of stock, the same not being whales nor anything that swims, and if it's more than I can swing by myself, why, he's a good neighbour of long standing, and able in a pinch, mebbe, to scrape up a few thousand dollars, or even more if it's a sure cinch, and how about it, and from one old friend to another just what is this new line?

Being busy I acted short. I said I was sticking to cattle in spite of the infamous gossip against 'em, and all reports to the contrary was mere society chatter. Still he acted like I was trying to fool him. He went out saying if I changed my mind any time I was to let him know, and he'd be over again soon to talk mules at least, if nothing else, and anything he could do for me any time, just say the word, and try some of this gum, and so forth. I was right puzzled by these here refined civilities of his until Pete comes in and tells me how the boys have stocked the old ranch with elephants and how Safety has tried to get him to tell the secret. I tell Pete he's done right to keep still, and then I go down to the bunk house and hear the whole thing.

By this time they're shipping thousands of steer

elephants at top prices; they catch 'em up off soft feed and fatten 'em on popcorn and peanuts, and every Thanksgiving they send a nice fat calf down to the White House, for no one looks at turkey any more. Sandy is now telling what a snap it will be to ride herd on elephants.

"You pick out a big one," he says, "and you build a little cupalo up on top of him and climb up into it by means of a ladder, and set there in this little furnished room with a good book, and smoke and pass the time away while your good old saddle elephant does the work. All you got to do is lean out of the front window now and then and jab him in the forehead with an ice pick, whichever way you want him to turn."

I said trust a cow-puncher to think up some way where he'd have to do as little work with his hands as he does with his head. But I admitted they seemed to have landed on old Timmins for once, because he had tried to get Pete to betray the secret and then come wheedling round to me about it. I said I could talk more intelligently next time, and he would sure come again because he had lavished two sticks of gum on me, which was an incredible performance and could not have been done except for an evil purpose.

"Now say," says Sandy, "that does look like we got him believing. I was going to kid him along about once more, then spring elephants on him, and we'd all have a good laugh at the old wolf. But it looks to me like a chance for better than a laugh; it looks to me like we might commit a real crime against him."

"He never carries anything on him," I says, "if you're meaning something plain, like highway robbery."

Sandy says he don't mean that; he means real Wall Street stuff, such as one gentleman can pull on another and still keep loose; crooked, he says, but not rough. I

ask what is the idea, and Sandy says get him more and more feverish about the vast returns from this secret enterprise. Then we'll cut out a bunch of culls—thin stuff and runts and cripples—and make him give about four times what they're worth on a promise to let him into the new deal; tell him we must be rid of this stuff to make room for the new animals, and naturally we'll favour our friends.

"There, now!" says Sandy. "I should be in Wall Street this minute, being able to think up a coop as pernicious as that: and I would of been there, too, only I hate city life."

"For once in the world's history," I says, "there may be a grain of sense in your words. Only no cows in the deal. Even to defraud the old crook I wouldn't let him have hide nor hair of a beef, not since he worked on my feelings in the matter of them bull calves two years ago. Mules, yes. But the cow is too worthy a beast to be mixed up in anything sinful I put over on that profiteer. Now I'll tell you what," I says, very businesslike: "you boys tole him along till he gets hectic enough to take that bunch of mule runts down in the south field, and anything you get over fifty dollars a head I'll split with you."

Sandy hollers at this. He says this bunch ain't mules but rabbits, and that I wouldn't refuse forty a head for 'em this minute. He says even a man expecting to be let in on a sure-thing elephant ranch would know something wicked was meant if asked to give even as much as fifty dollars for these insects. I tell him all very true; but this is just the margin for his lasting financial genius which he displays so little reticence about that it'll get into the papers and make him a marked man from coast to coast if he ain't careful. He says oh, all right, if I want to take it that way, and he'll see what he can do.

Mebbe he can get fifty-five a head, which would not only give the boys a good laugh but provide a little torch money.

I left 'em plotting against a man that had never been touched by any plot whatever. I resolved to remain kind of aloof from their nefarious doings. It didn't seem quite dignified for one of my standing to be mixed up in a deal so crooked—at least no more than necessary to get my share of the pickings.

Sure enough, the very next day here come the depraved old outcast marauding round again at lunch time and et with the boys in the kitchen. He found 'em full of suppressed excitement and secret speech and careless talk about large sums of money. It must of been like sweetest music to his ears. One says how much would it be safe to count on cutting up the first year—how much in round numbers; and another would say that in round numbers, what with the expense of getting started and figuring everything down to the last cent, it wouldn't be safe to count on more than a hundred thousand dollars; but, of course, for the second year, now, why it would be nearer two hundred thousand in round numbers, even figuring everything fine and making big allowance for shrinkage. After that they handed money back and forth in round numbers till they got sick of the sound of it.

They said Safety set and listened in a trance, only waking up now and then to see if he couldn't goad someone into revealing the name of this new animal. But they always foiled him. Sandy Sawtelle drew an affecting picture of himself being cut off by high living at the age of ninety, leaving six or eight million dollars in round numbers and having his kin folks squabble over his will till the lawyers got most of it. They said Safety hardly et a morsel and had an evil glitter in his eyes.

And after lunch he went out to the wood-pile where old Pete was working and offered him two bits in money to tell him the secret, and when old Pete scorned him he raised it to four bits. I guess the idea of any one refusing money merely for a little talk had never seemed possible to him. He must of thought there was sure something in it. I was away that day, but when I got back and heard about his hellish attempt to bribe old Pete I told the boys they sure had the chance of a lifetime. I said if there was a mite of financial prowess in the bunch they would start the price on them runt mules at one hundred dollars flat, because it was certain that Safety had struck the skids.

Next day it looked better than ever. Safety not only appeared in the afternoon but he brought me a quart jar of honey from his own bees. Any one not having looked up his criminal record would little understand what this meant. I pretended to be too busy to be startled at the gift, which broke thirty years of complete inactivity in that line. I looked worried and important with a litter of papers on my desk and seemed to have no time to waste on callers. He mentioned mules once or twice with no effect whatever, then says he hears I'm going into a new line that seems like it might have a few dollars in it, and he hopes I won't lose my all, because so many things nowadays look good till they're tried. I was crafty. I said I might be going into a new line, then again it might be nothing but idle talk and he better not believe everything he hears.

He took up the jar of honey and fondled it, with his face looking like he was laying a loved one to rest, and said he wouldn't mind going into something new himself if he could be sure it was sound, because the stock business at present was a dog's life. He said the war was to be won by food, and every patriot should either

go across or come across, and he was trying to stand by the flag and save all the food he could, but by the way his help acted at mealtime you'd think they was a gang of German spies. Watch 'em eat beans, he said, and you'd think they'd never heard that beans had gone from three cents a pound to sixteen; but they had heard it, because he'd told 'em so in plain English more than once. But it had no effect. The way they dished into 'em you'd think we'd been endowed with beans the same as with God's own sunlight.

He said it was discouraging to a staunch patriot. Here was the President trying to make democracy safe for the world, and he was now going to stand by the Administration even if he had voted the Republican ticket up to now; but three of his men had quit only yesterday and the war was certainly lost if the labouring classes kept on making gods of their stomachs that way. And as a matter of fact now, as between old friends and neighbours, if I had something that looked good, why not keep it all together just with us here in the valley, he, though a poor man, being able to scrape up a few thousand dollars in round numbers for any enterprise that was a cinch.

And the old hound being worth a good half million dollars at that instant! But I kept control of my face and looked still more worried and important and said I might have to take in a good man, and then again I might not. I couldn't tell till I got some odd lots of stock cleaned up. Then I looked at some more documents and, like I was talking unconsciously to myself, I muttered, though distinctly: "Now that there bunch of runt mules—they'll have to go; but, of course, not for any mere song."

Then I studied some more documents in a masterful manner and forgot my caller entirely till at last he

pussyfooted out, having caught sight of Sandy down by the corral.

Pretty soon Sandy reports to me. He says Safety is hurt at my cold manner to an old friend and neighbour that's always running in with a jar of honey or some knickknack; and he had mentioned the runt mules, saying he might be induced to consider 'em though I probably won't let 'em go for any mere song, contemptible as they are. Sandy says he's right; that it's got to be a whole opera with words and music for them mules. He says I got a reason for acting firm about the price, the reason being that this new line I'm going to embark in is such a sure thing that I want only friends to come in, and I got to be convinced first that their heart is in the right place.

Safety says his heart is always getting the best of his head in stock deals, but just how foolish will I expect an old and tried friend to seem about these scrub mules that nobody in his right mind would touch at any price.

Sandy yawns like he was weary of it all and says a hundred dollars flat. He said Safety just stood still and looked at him forever without batting an eye, till he got rattled and said that mebbe ninety-five might be considered. That's a trick with this old robber when a party's got something to sell him. They tell their price and he just keeps still and looks at 'em—not indignant nor astonished, not even interested, but merely fishlike. Most people can't stand it long, it's that uncanny. They get fussed and nervous, and weaken before he's said a single word.

But it was certain now that the mystery was getting to Safety, because otherwise he'd have laughed his head off at the mention of a hundred dollars for these mules. Three months before he'd heard me himself offer 'em for forty a head. You see, when I bought bands of

mules from time to time I'd made the sellers throw in the little ones to go free with the trade. I now had twenty-five or so, but it had begun to get to me that mebbe those sellers hadn't been so easy as I thought at the time. They was knotty-headed little runts that I'd never bothered to handle.

Last spring I had the boys chink up the cracks in the corral and put each one of the cunning little mites into the chute and roach it so as to put a bow in its neck; then I put the bunch on good green feed where they would fatten and shed off; but it was wasted effort. They looked so much like field mice I was afraid that cats would make a mistake. After they got fat the biggest one looked as if he'd weigh close up to seven hundred and fifty. It was when they had begun to buy mules too; that is to say, mules! But no such luck as a new West Pointer coming to inspect these; nothing but wise old cavalry captains that when they put an eye on the bunch would grin friendly at me and hesitate only long enough to put some water in the radiator. I bet there never was a bunch of three-year-old mules that stood so much condemning.

After offering 'em for forty a head one time to a party and having him answer very simply by asking how the road was on beyond and which turn did he take, I quit bothering. After that when buyers come along I told the truth and said I didn't have any mules. I had to keep my real ones, and it wasn't worth while showing those submules. And this was the bunch Sandy had told S. F. Timmins he could take away for a hundred a head—or even ninety-five. And Safety hadn't laughed!

And would you have wondered when he sifts in a couple days later and makes me a cold offer of sixty dollars a head for this choice livestock? Yes, sir! He says "Live and let live" is his motto, and he wants to

prove that I have wronged him in the past if I ever had the faintest suspicion that he wasn't the ideal party to have in on a deal that was going to net everyone concerned a handsome fortune. He says the fact is money goes through his fingers like water if you come right down to it; and sixty or even sixty-five if I want to push him to extremes, because he's the last man on God's green earth to let five dollars split up old neighbours that ought to be hand and glove in any new deal that come up.

It like to of keeled me over, but I recovered and become busier than ever and got out my bank book and begun to figure over that. I said Sandy Sawtelle had the handling of this particular bunch of my assets and I couldn't be bothered by it.

So he mooches down to the barn till Sandy come in with Buck Devine. They was chattering about three hundred thousand dollars in round numbers when they got near enough for him to overhear their private conversation. They wondered why they had wasted so much of their lives in the cattle business, but now them old hard-working days was over, or soon would be, with nothing to do but travel round in Pullman palace cars and see America first, and go to movies, and so forth. Safety wished to haggle some about the mules, but Sandy says he's already stated the price in clear, ringing tones, and he has no time to waste, being that I must send him down that night to get an order on the wire for two carloads of the Little Giant peanut. Safety just blinked at this, not even asking why the peanuts; and the boys left him cold.

When I told 'em about the offer to me of sixty or a possible sixty-five, they at once done a medicine dance.

"This here will be the richest coop ever pulled off west of Cheyenne," says Buck; and Sandy says he

guesses anybody not blind can now see that well-known street in New York he ought to have his office on. He says he hopes Safety don't fall too easy, because he wants more chance to work it up.

But Sandy is doomed to disappointment. Safety holds off only two days more. Two days he loafs round at mealtimes, listening to their rich converse and saying he'd like to know who's a better friend of this outfit than he's been for twenty years. The boys tell him if he's such a good friend to go ahead and prove it with a little barter that would be sure to touch my heart. And the first day Safety offers seventy-five a head for these here jack rabbits, which they calmly ignore and go on talking about Liberty Bonds being a good safe investment; and the second day he just cries like a child that he'll pay eighty-five and trust to their honour that he's to have in on this new sure-thing deal.

That seemed enough, so they all shook hands with the spendthrift and slapped him on the back in good fellowship, and said they knew all the time he had a heart of gold and they feel free to say now that once the money has passed he won't be let to go off the place till he has heard all about the new enterprise and let in on the ground floor, and they hope he won't ever forget this moment when the money begins to roll in fit to smother him in round numbers. So Safety says he knows they're a good square set of boys, as clean as a hound's tooth, and he'll be over to-morrow to take over the stock and hear the interesting details.

The boys set up late that night figuring their share of the burglary. There was twenty-five of these ground squirrels. I was to get my fifty a head, at least ten of which was illegitimate. Then for the thirty-five, which was the real robbery, I was to take half, and eight of the boys the other half. I begun to wonder that night just

what could be done to us under the criminal law. It looked like three years in some good jail wouldn't be a bit too harsh.

Next day bright and early here comes frugal Safety, gangling along behind his whiskers and bringing one of his ill-fed hirelings to help drive the stuff back. Safety is rubbing his hands and acting very sprightly, with an air of false good fellowship. It almost seems like he was afraid they had thought better of the trade and might try to crawl out. He wants it over quick. They all go down and help him drive his purchase out of the lower field, where they been hiding in the tall grass, and in no time at all have the bunch headed down the lane on to the county road, with Safety's man keeping well up to protect 'em from the coyotes.

Next there's kind of a solemn moment when the check is being made out. Safety performs that serious operation down at the bunk house. Making out any check is always the great adventure with him. He writes it with his heart's blood, and not being the greatest scholar in the world he has to count the letters in his name after it's written—he knows there ought to be nine together—and then he has to wipe the ink off his hands and sigh dismally and say if this thing keeps up he'll be spending his old age at the poor farm, and so forth. It all went according to schedule, except that he seemed strangely eager and under a severe nervous strain.

Me? I'd been sort of hanging round on the edge of events while the dastardly deed was being committed, not seeming to be responsible in any way. My Lord! I still wanted to be able to face the bereaved man as an honest woman and tell him it was only some nonsense of the boys for which I could not be held under the law, no matter how good a lawyer he'd get. When they

come trooping out of the bunk house I was pretending to consult Abner, the blacksmith, about some mower parts. And right off I was struck by the fact that Safety seemed to be his old self again; his air of false gayety and nervous strain had left him and he was cold and silent and deadly, like the poisonous cobra of India.

But now they was going to spring the new secret enterprise on him, so I moved off toward the house a bit, not wanting to be too near when his screams begun. It did seem kind of shameful, taking advantage of the old miser's grasping habits; still, I remembered a few neat things he'd done to me and I didn't slink too far into the background. Safety was standing by his horse with the boys all gathered close round him, and I heard Sandy say "Elephants—nothing but elephants—that's the new idea!"

Then they all begun to talk at once, jabbering about the peanuts and popcorn that crowds of people will come to buy from us to feed back to our stock, and how there's more meat in an elephant than in six steers, and about how the punchers will be riding round in these little cupalos up on top of their big saddle elephants; and they kept getting swifter and more excited in their talk, till at last they just naturally exploded when they made sure Safety got the idea and would know he'd been made a fool of. They had a grand time; threw their hats in the air and danced round their victim and punched each other, and their yells and hearty laughter could of been heard for miles up and down the creek. Two or three had guns they let off to add to the gleeful noise. Oh, it was deuces wild for about three minutes. They nearly died laughing.

Then the whole thing kind of died a strange and painful death. Safety wasn't taking on one bit like a man that's been stung. He stood there cold and malignant

and listened to the noise and didn't bat an eye till he just naturally quelled the disorder. It got as still as a church, and then Safety talked a little in a calm voice.

"Elephants?" says he, kind of amused. "Why, elephants ain't no good stock proposition because it takes 'em so long to mature! Elephants is often a hundred and twenty years old. You'd have to feed one at least forty years to get him fit to ship. I really am surprised at you boys, going into a proposition like that without looking up the details. It certainly ain't anything for my money. Why, you couldn't even veal an elephant till he was about fifteen years old, which would need at least six thousand dollars' worth of peanuts; and what kind of a stock business is that, I'd like to know. And even if they could rustle their own feed, what kind of a business is it where you could only ship once in a life-time? You boys make me tired, going hell-bent into an enterprise where you'd all be dead and forgotten before the first turnover of your stock."

He now looked at 'em in a sad, rebuking manner. It was like an icy blast from Greenland the way he took it.

Two or three tried to start the big laugh again, but their yips was feeble and died quickly out. They just stood there foolish. Even Sandy Sawtelle couldn't think of anything bright to say.

Safety now climbs on his horse, strangely cheerful, and says; "Well, I'll have to be getting along with them new mules of mine." Then he kind of giggled at the crowd and says: "I certainly got the laugh on this outfit, starting a business where this here old Methusalem hisself could hardly get it going good before death cut him off!"

And away he rides, chuckling like it was an awful joke on us. Not a single scream of agony about what had been done to him with them stunted mules.

Of course that was all I needed to know. One deadly chill of fear took me from head to foot. I knew perfectly well our trench was mined and the fuse lighted. Up comes this chucklehead of a Sawtelle, and for once in his life he's puzzled.

"Well," he says, "you got to give old S. F. credit for one thing. Did you see the way he tried to switch the laugh over on to us, and me with his trusty check right here in my hand? I never would have thought it, but he is certainly one awful good game loser!"

"Game loser nothing!" I says. "He's just a game winner. Any time you see that old boy acting game he's won. And he's won now, no matter how much the known facts look against it. I don't know how, but he's won."

They all begin to tell me I must be mistaken, because look at the price we got for stuff we hadn't been able to sell at any price before. I says I am looking at that, but I'm also obliged to look at Safety after he's paid that price, and the laws of Nature certainly ain't been suspended all at once. I offer to bet 'em what they've made on the deal that Safety has run true to form. "Mark my words," I says, "this is one sad day for the Arrowhead! I don't know how or why, but we'll soon find out; and if you don't believe me, now's the time to double your money."

But they hung off on that. They got too much respect for my judgment. And they admitted that Safety's way of standing the gaff had been downright uncanny. So there was nothing to do but pay over their share of this tainted money and wait for the blow, eight hundred and seventy-five dollars being the amount I split with 'em for their masterly headwork in the depredation.

That very day in the mail comes a letter that has been

delayed because this here Government of ours pinches a penny even worse than old Timmins does. Yes, sir; this letter had been mailed at Seattle with a two-cent stamp the day after the Government had boosted the price to three cents. And what does the Government do? Does it say: "Oh, send it along! Why pinch pennies?" Not at all. It takes a printed card and a printed envelope and the time of a clerk and an R.F.D. mail carrier to send me word that I must forward one cent if I want this letter—spends at least two cents to get one cent. Well, it takes two days for that notice to reach me; and of course I let it lie round a couple of days, thinking it's probably an advertisement; and then two days for my one-cent stamp to go back to this parsimonious postmaster; and two days for the letter to get here; making about eight days, during which things had happened that I should of known about. Yes, sir; it's a great Government that will worry over one cent and then meet one of these smooth profiteers and loosen up on a million dollars like a cowhand with three months' pay hitting a wet town. Of course it was all over when I read this letter.

I rolled another cigarette for the injured woman it being no time for words.

"It just goes to show," she observed after the first relishing draft, "that we should be honest, even with defectives like old Timmins. This man in Seattle that keeps track of prices for me writes that the top of the mule market has blown sky-high; that if I got anything looking at all like a mule not to let it go off the place for less than two hundred dollars, because mule buyers is sure desperate. Safety must of got the same tip, only you can bet his correspondent put the full three cents on the letter. Safety would never have trusted a

strange postmaster with the excess. Anyway he sold that bunch of rabbits a week later for one hundred and seventy-five a head, thus adding twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars of my money to his tainted fortune. You can imagine the pins and needles he'd been on for a week, scared I'd get the tip and knowing if he even mentioned them runts at any price whatever that I'd be wise at once. That joke of the boys must of seemed heaven-sent to him.

"You ought to heard the lecture I read them fool punchers on common honesty and how the biter is always bit. I scared 'em good; there hasn't been an elephant on the place since that day. They're a chastened lot, all right. I was chastened myself. I admit it. I don't hardly believe I'll ever attempt anything crooked on old Safety again—and yet, I don't know."

The lady viciously expelled the last smoke from her cigarette and again took up the knitting.

"I don't really know but if there was some wanton duplicity come up that I could handle myself and not have to leave to that pack of amateur thieves out in the bunk house, and it was dead sure and I didn't risk doing more than two years' penal servitude—yes, I really don't know. Even now mebbe all ain't over between us."

II

A LOVE STORY

I HAD for some time been noting a slight theatrical tinge to the periodical literature supported by the big table in the Arrowhead living room. Chiefly the table's burden is composed of trade journals of the sober quality of the *Stockbreeder's Gazette* or *Mine, Quarry & Derrick* or the "Farmer's Almanac." But if, for example, one really tired of a vivacious column headed "Chats on Fertilizers" one could, by shuffling the litter, come upon a less sordid magazine frankly abandoned to the interests of the screen drama.

The one I best recall has limned upon its cover in acceptable flesh tints a fair young face of flawless beauty framed in a mass of curling golden ringlets. The dewy eyes, shaded to mystery by lashes of uncommon length, flash a wistful appeal that is faintly belied by the half-smiling lips and the dimpling chin. The contours are delicate yet firm; a face of haunting appeal—a face in which tears can be seldom but the sprightly rain of April, and the smile, when it melts the sensitive lips, will yet warn that hearts are made to ache and here is one not all too merry in its gladness. It is the face of one of our famous screen beauties, and we know, even from this tinted half-tone, that the fame has been deserved.

On one of those tired Arrowhead nights, inwardly debating the possible discourtesy of an early bedding after ten wet miles of trout stream, I came again and

again to this compelling face of the sad smile and the glad tears. It recalled an ideal feminine head much looked at in my nonage. It was lithographed mostly in pink and was labeled "Tempest and Sunshine." So I loitered by the big table, dreaming upon the poignant perfections of this idol of a strange new art. I dreamed until awakened by the bustling return of my hostess, Mrs. Lysander John Pettengill, who paused beside me to build an after-dinner cigarette, herself glancing meantime at the flawless face on the magazine cover. I perceived instantly that she also had been caught by its not too elusive charm.

"A beautiful face," I said.

Ma Pettengill took the magazine from me and studied the dainty thing.

"Yes, he's certainly beautiful," she assented. "He's as handsome as a Greek goddess." Thus did the woman ambiguously praise that famous screen star, J. Harold Armytage. "And the money he makes! His salary is one of them you see compared with the President's so as to make the latter seem a mere trifle. That's a funny thing. I bet at least eighteen million grown people in this country never did know how much they was paying their president till they saw it quoted beside some movie star's salary in a piece that tells how he's getting about four times what we pay the man in the White House. Ain't it a great business, though! Here's this horrible male beauty that would have to be mighty careful to escape extermination if he was anything but an actor. Being that, however, he not only eludes the vengeance of a sickened populace, but he can come out and be raw about it. Here, let me show you."

She turned to the page where J. Harold Armytage began to print a choice few of the letters he daily re-

ceived from admirers of the reputedly frailer sex. She now read me one of these with lamentable efforts of voice to satirize its wooing note: "My darling! I saw that dear face of yours again to-night in All For Love! So noble and manly you were in the sawmill scene where first you turn upon the scoundrelly millionaire father of the girl you love, then save him from the dynamite bomb of the strikers at the risk of your own. Oh, my dearest! Something tells me your heart is as pure and sweet as your acting, that your dear face could not mask an evil thought. Oh, my man of all the world! If only you and I together might——"

It seemed enough. Ma Pettingill thought so too. The others were not unlike it. The woman then read me a few of the replies of J. Harold Armytage to his unknown worshippers. The famous star was invariably modest and dignified in these. Tactfully, as a gentleman must in any magazine of wide circulation, he deprecated the worship of these adoring ones and kindly sought to persuade them that he was but a man—not a god, even if he did chance to receive one of the largest salaries in the business. The rogue! No god—with the glorious lines of his face there on the cover to controvert this awkward disclaimer! His beauty flaunted to famished hearts, what avail to protest weakly that they should put away his image or even to hint, as now and again he was stern enough to do, that their frankness bordered on the unmaidenly?

I called Ma Pettengill's attention to this engaging modesty. I said it must be an affair of some delicacy to rebuff ardent and not too reticent fair ones in a public print, and that I considered J. Harold Armytage to have come out of it with a display of taste that could be called unusual. The woman replied, with her occasional irrelevance, that if the parties that hired him

should read this stuff they probably wouldn't even then take him out on the lot and have him bitterly kicked by a succession of ten large labouring men who would take kindly to the task. She then once more said that the movies was sure one great business, and turned in the magazine to pleasanter pages on which one Vida Sommers, also a screen idol, it seemed, gave warning and advice to young girls who contemplated a moving-picture career.

Portraits of Vida Sommers in her best-known rôles embellished these pages. In all of the portraits she wept. In some the tears were visible; in others they had to be guessed, the face being drawn by anguish. Her feminine correspondents wished particularly to be told of the snares and temptations besetting the path of the young girl who enters this perilous career. Many of them seemed rather vague except upon this point. They all seemed to be sure that snares and temptations would await them, and would Vida Sommers please say how these could be avoided by young and impressionable girls of good figure and appearance who were now waiting on table at the American House in Centralia, Illinois, or accepting temporary employment in mercantile establishments in Chicago, or merely living at home in Zanesville, Ohio, amid conditions unbearably cramping to their aspirations?

And Vida Sommers told every one of them not to consider the pictures but as a final refuge from penury. She warned them that they would find the life one of hard work and full of disappointments. It seemed that even the snares and temptations were disappointing, being more easily evaded than many of her correspondents appeared to suspect. She advised them all to marry some good, true man and make a home for him. And surely none of them could have believed the

life to be a joyous one after studying these sorrowful portraits of Vida Sommers.

"That's my little actress friend," said Ma Pettengill. "Doesn't she cry something grand!"

"You've been cheating me," I answered. "I never knew you had a little actress friend. How did you get her? And doesn't she ever play anything cheerful?"

"Of course not! She only plays mothers, and you know what that means in moving pictures. Ever see a moving-picture mother that had a chance to be happy for more than the first ten feet of film? You certainly got to cry to hold down that job. Ain't she always jolted quick in the first reel by the husband getting all ruined up in Wall Street, or the child getting stole, or the daughter that's just budding into womanhood running off with a polished shoe-drummer with city ways, or the only son robbing a bank, or husband taking up with a lady adventuress that lives across the hall in the same flat and outdresses mother?

"Then it's one jolt after another for her till the last ten feet of the last reel, when everything comes right somewhere on a ranch out in the great clean West where husband or son has got to be a man again by mingling with the honest-hearted drunken cowboys in their bar-room frolics, or where daughter has won back her womanhood and made a name for herself by dancing the Nature dance in the Red Eye Saloon for rough but tender-hearted miners that shower their gold on her when stewed. Only, in this glad time of the last ten feet she still has to cry a-plenty because the clouds have passed and she's Oh, so happy at last! Yes, sir; they get mother going and coming. And when she ain't weeping she has to be scared or mad or something that keeps her face busy. Here—I got some programmes of new pieces Vida just sent me. You can see she's a

great actress; look at that one: 'Why Did You Make My Mamma Cry?' And these other two."

I looked and believed. The dramas were variously and pithily described as The Picture with the Punch Powerful—The Smashing Five-Reel Masterpiece—A Play of Peculiar Problems and Tense Situations—Six Gripping Reels, 7,000 Feet and Every Foot a Punch! Vida Sommers, in the scenes reproduced from these plays, had indeed a busy face. In the picture captioned "Why Did You Make My Mamma Cry?" the tiny golden-haired girl is reproaching her father in evening dress. I read the opening lines of the synopsis: "A young business man, who has been made successful through his wife's money, is led to neglect her through pressure of affairs, falls into the toils of a dancer in a public place and becomes a victim of her habit, that of drinking perfume in her tea——"

But I had not the heart to follow this tragedy. In another, "The Woman Pays—Powerful and Picturesque, a Virile Masterpiece of Red-Blooded Hearts," Vida Sommers is powerfully hating her husband whom she has confronted in the den of a sneering and superbly gowned adventuress who declares that the husband must choose between them. Of course there can be no doubt about the husband's choice. No sane movie actor would hesitate a second. The caption says of Vida Sommers: "Her Love Has Turned to Hate." It may be good acting, but it would never get her chosen by the male of her species—the adventuress being what is known in some circles as a pippin.

I studied still another of these documents—"Hearts Asunder." Vida Sommers has sent her beautiful daughter to the spring for a pail of water, though everyone in the audience must know that Gordon Balch, the detestable villain, is lurking outside for precisely this

to occur. The synopsis beautiful says: "The mother now goes in search of her darling, only to find her struggling in the grasp of Gordon Balch, who is trying to force his attentions on her." This is where Vida Sommers has to look frightened, though in a later picture one sees that her fright changed to "A Mother's Honest Rage." The result is that Gordon Balch gets his, and gets it good. The line under his last appearance is "The End of a Misspent Life." Vida Sommers here registers pity. As Ma Pettengill had said, her face seemed never to have a moment's rest.

While I studied these exhibits my hostess had not been silent upon the merits of her little actress friend. Slowly she made me curious as to the origin and inner life of this valued member of an exalted profession.

"Yes, sir; there she is at the top, drawing down big money, with a nice vine-clad home in this film town, furnished from a page in a woman's magazine, with a big black limousine like a hearse—all but the plumes—and a husband that she worships the ground he walks on. Everything the heart can desire, even to being mother to some of the very saddest persons ever seen on a screen. It shows what genius will do for a woman when she finds out what kind of genius she's got and is further goaded by the necessity of supporting a husband in the style to which he has been accustomed by a doting father. She's some person now, let me tell you.

"She spent a week with me in Red Gap last fall, and you'd ought to seen how certain parties kowtowed to me so they'd get to meet her. I found that about every woman under fifty in our town is sure she was born for this here picture work, from Henrietta Templeton Price to Beryl Mae Macomber, who's expecting any day to be snapped up by some shrewd manager that her type is bound to appeal to, she being a fair young thing with

big eyes and lots of teeth, like all film actresses. Metta Bigler, that teaches oil painting and burnt wood, give Vida a reception in her Bohemian studio in Red Gap's Latin Quarter—the studio having a chain of Chianti bottles on the wall and an ash tray with five burnt cigarette ends on a taboret to make it look Bohemian—and that was sure the biggest thrill our town has had since the Gus Levy All Star Shamrock Vaudeville Company stranded there five years ago. It just shows how important my little actress friend is—and look what she come up from!"

I said I wouldn't mind looking what she come up from if she had started low enough to make it exciting.

Ma Pettengill said she had that! She had come up from the gutter. She said that Vida Sommers, the idol of thousands, had been "a mere daughter of the people." Her eyes crinkled as she uttered this phrase. So I chose a chair in the shadow while she built a second cigarette.

Ten years ago I'm taking a vacation down in New York City. Along comes a letter from Aunt Esther Colborn, of Fredonia, who is a kind of a third cousin of mine about twice removed. Says her niece, Vida, has had a good city job as cashier of a dairy lunch in Boston, which is across the river from some college, but has thrown this job to the winds to marry the only college son of a rich New York magnate or Wall Street crook who has cast the boy off for contracting this low alliance with a daughter of the people. Aunt Esther is now afraid Vida isn't right happy and wants I should look her up and find out. It didn't sound too good, but I obliged.

I go to the address in Sixty-seventh Street on the

West Side and find that Vida is keeping a boarding house. But I was ready to cheer Aunt Esther with a telegram one second after she opened the door on me—in a big blue apron and a dustcap on her hair. She was the happiest young woman I ever did see—shining it out every which way. A very attractive girl about twenty-five, with a slim figure and one of these faces that ain't exactly of howling beauty in any one feature, but that sure get you when they're sunned up with joy like this one was.

She was pleased to death when I told her my name, and of course I must come in and stay for dinner so I could see all her boarders that was like one big family and, above all, meet her darling husband Clyde when he got home from business. The cheeriest thing she was, and I adore to meet people that are cheery, so I said nothing would please me better. She took me up to her little bedroom to lay my things off and then down to the parlour where she said I must rest and excuse her because she still had a few little things to supervise. She did have too. In the next hour and a half she run up and down two flights of stairs at least ten times. I could hear her sweeping overhead and jamming things round on the stove when she raced down to the kitchen. Yes, she had several little things to supervise and one girl to help her. I peeked into the kitchen once while I was wandering through the lower rooms, and she seemed to be showing this girl how to boil potatoes. I wondered if she never run down and if her happy look was really chronic or mebbe put on for my benefit. Still, I could hear her singing to herself and she moved like a happy person.

In looking round the parlour I was greeted on every wall by pictures of a charming youth I guessed was darling Clyde. A fine young face he had, and looked

as happy as Vida herself. There was pictures of him with a tennis racket and on a sailboat and with a mandolin and standing up with his college glee club and setting on a high-powered horse and so forth, all showing he must be a great social favourite and one born to have a good time. I wondered how he'd come to confer himself on the cashier of a quick-lunch place. I thought it must be one of these romances. Then—I'm always remembering the foolishest things—I recalled a funny little absent look in Vida's eyes when she spoke of her darling coming home from business. I thought now it must of been pride; that he was performing some low job in a factory or store while she run the boarding house, and she didn't want me to know it. I thought he must be a pretty fine rich man's son to stand the gaff this way when cast off by his father for mixing up with a daughter of the people.

It come dinnertime; about a dozen boarders straggling in, with Vida in a pretty frock anxious because darling Clyde was ten minutes late and of course something fatal must of happened to him in crossing a crowded street. But nothing had. He showed up safe and sound and whistling in another ten minutes, and became the life of the party. He looked near as happy as Vida did when she embraced him out in the hall, a fine handsome young fellow, the best-natured in the world, jollying the boarders and jollying me and jollying Vida that he called Baby Girl, or Babe. I saw, too, that I must of been mistaken about the job he was holding down. He was dressed in a very expensive manner, with neat little gold trinkets half concealed about him, the shirt and collar exactly right and the silk socks carefully matching the lavender tie.

He kept the table lively all through dinner with jokes and quips from the latest musical comedies and anec-

dotes of his dear old college days, and how that very afternoon he had won a silver cup and the pool championship of his college club—and against a lot of corking good players, too, he didn't mind saying. Also I noticed we was eating a mighty good dinner; so darned good you didn't see how Vida could set it up at the price boarders usually pay.

After dinner Clyde sat down to the piano in the parlour and entertained one and all with songs of a comic or sentimental character. He knew a piano intimately, and his voice was one of these here melting tenors that get right inside of you and nestle. He was about the most ingratiating young man I'd ever met, and I didn't wonder any more about Vida's look of joy being permanent. She'd look in on the party every once in a while from the kitchen or the dining room where she was helping her Swede do the dishes for fifteen people and set the table for breakfast.

She was about an hour at this, and when at last she'd slipped out of her big apron and joined us she was looking right tuckered but still joyous. Clyde patted his Baby Girl's hand when she come in, and she let herself go into an easy-chair near him that one of the boarders got up to give her. I got the swift idea that this was the first time all day she'd set down with any right feeling of rest.

Then Clyde sung to her. You could tell it was a song he meant for her and never sung till she'd got the work done up. A right pretty old song it was, Clyde throwing all the loving warmth of his first-class tenor voice into the words:

Good night, good night, beloved!
I come to watch o'er thee,
To be near thee, to be near thee.

I forget the rest, but there was happy tears in Vida's eyes when he finished in one climbing tenor burst. Then Clyde gets up and says he has an engagement down to his college club because some of his dear old classmates has gathered there for a quiet little evening of reminiscence and the jolly old rascals pretend they can't get along without him. Vida beams on him brighter than ever and tells him to be sure and have a good time, which I'd bet money he'd be sure to.

It was a very pretty scene when they said good night. Vida pretended that Clyde's voice was falling off from smoking too many cigarettes at this club. "I wouldn't mind you're going there, but I just know you spend most of the time in the club's horrid old smoking room!" She tells him this with a pout. Smoking room of a club! The knowing little minx! And Clyde chided her right back in a merry fashion. He lifted one of her hands and said his Baby Girl would have to take better care of them because the cunnun' little handies was getting all rough. Then they both laughed and went out for a long embrace in the hall.

Vida come back with a glowing countenance, and the boarders having dropped off to their rooms when the life of the party went to his club we had a nice chat. All about Clyde. She hoped I did like him, and I frankly said he was about the most taking young brat I'd ever been close to. She explained how their union had been a dream; that during their entire married life of a year and a half he had never spoken one cross word to her. She said I couldn't imagine his goodness of heart nor his sunny disposition nor how much everyone admired him. But the tired thing got so sleepy in ten minutes, even talking about her husband, that she couldn't keep back the yawns, so I said I'd had a wonderful evening and would have to go now.

But up in the bedroom, while I'm putting my things on, she gets waked up and goes more into detail about her happiness. I've never been able to figure out why, but women will tell each other things in a bedroom that they wouldn't dream of telling in any other room. Not that Vida went very far. Just a few little points. Like how Clyde's father had cast him off when they married and how she had felt herself that she was nothing but a bad woman taking advantage of this youth, she being a whole year older than he was; but Clyde had acted stunning in the matter, telling his father he had chosen the better part. Also it turned out this father hadn't cast him off from so much after all, because the old man went flat broke in Wall Street a couple of months later, perishing of heart failure right afterward, and about the only thing Clyde would of drawn from the estate anyway was an old-fashioned watch of his grandfather's with a chain made from his grandmother's hair when she was a bride.

I gathered they had been right up against it at this time, except for the two thousand dollars that had been left Vida by her Uncle Gideon in the savings bank at Fredonia. Clyde, when she drew this out, wanted they should go to Newport with it where they could lead a quiet life for a couple of months while he looked about for a suitable opening for himself. But Vida had been firm, even ugly, she said, on this point. She'd took the two thousand and started a boarding house that would be more like a home than a boarding house, though Clyde kept saying he'd never be able to endure seeing the woman bearing his name reduced to such ignoble straits.

Still he had swallowed his foolish pride and been really very nice about it after she got the business started. Now he was always telling her to be sure and set a good

table. He said if you were going to do a thing, even if it was only keeping a boarding house, to do it well. That was his motto—do it well or don't do it at all! So she was buying the best cuts of meats and all fresh vegetables because of his strict ideas in this matter, and it didn't look as if they'd ever really make a fortune at it—to say nothing of there being more persons than I'd believe that had hard luck and got behind in their payments, and of course one couldn't be stern to the poor unfortunates.

I listened to this chatter till it seemed about time to ask what business Clyde had took up. It seemed that right at the moment he was disengaged. It further seemed that he had been disengaged at most other moments since he had stooped to this marriage with a daughter of the people. I mustn't think it was the poor boy's fault, though. He was willing at all times to accept a situation and sometimes would get so depressed that he'd actually look for work. Twice he had found it, but it proved to be something confining in an office where the hours were long and conditions far from satisfactory.

That's how she put it, with glowing eyes and flushed cheeks: "It proved to be mere dull routine work not in the least suited to darling Clyde's talents and the conditions were far from satisfactory. I had the hardest time prevailing on him to give the nasty old places up and wait patiently for a suitable opening. He was quite impatient with me when he consented—but, of course, he's only a boy of twenty-four, a whole year younger than I am. I tell him every day a suitable opening is bound to occur very soon. You see, he had so many grand friends, people of the right sort that are wealthy. I insist on his meeting them constantly. Just think; only last week he spent Saturday and Sun-

day at one of the biggest country houses on Long Island, and had such a good time. He's a prime favourite with a lot of people like that and they're always having him to dine or to the opera or to their balls and parties. I miss him horribly, of course, and the poor dear misses me, but I tell him it will surely lead to something. His old college chums all love him too—a boy makes so many valuable friends in college, don't you think? A lot of them try to put things in his way. I couldn't bear to have him accept a situation unworthy of him—I know it would kill him. Why, he wilts like a flower under the least depression."

Well, I set and listened to a long string of this—and not a word for me to say. What could any one of said? Wasn't it being told to me by the happiest woman I ever set eyes on? Yes, sir; I'd never believe how gentle natured the boy was. Why, that very morning, being worried about something that went wrong with breakfast, which she had to turn out at five A. M. to get started hadn't she clean forgot to change his studs to a fresh shirt? And, to make it worse, hadn't she laid out a wrong color of socks with his lavender tie? But had he been cross to her, as most men would of been? Not for one second! He'd simply joked her about it when she brought up his breakfast tray, just as he'd joked her to-night about her hands getting rough from the kitchen work. And so forth and so forth!

The poor thing had got so dead for sleep by this time that she was merely babbling. She'd probably of fallen over in her clothes if I hadn't been there. Anyway, I got her undressed and into bed. She said Clyde's good-night song always rung in her ears till she slept. It didn't ring long this night. She was off before I got out the door. Darned if I hadn't been kind of embarrassed by her talk, knowing it would never do for me

to bust in with anything bordering on the vicious, such as suggesting that if Clyde now and then went into the kitchen and helped Baby Girl with the dishes it would make a very attractive difference in him. I took another good look at his pictures in the parlour before I let myself out of the house. He still looked good—but hell!

I wrote Aunt Esther the same evening not to worry one minute about Vida's happiness, because I wished we could all be as happy as she was. All the same I took pains to go round to that boarding house a couple times more because it seemed like the girl's happiness might have a bum foundation. Darling Clyde was as merry and attentive as ever and Vida was still joyous. I guess she kept joyous at her work all day by looking forward to that golden moment after dinner when her boy would sing Good night, good night, beloved—he'd come to watch o'er her! How that song did light her face up!

She confided to me one of these times that the funny men are always making jokes about how much it costs a woman for clothes, and she wondered why they didn't make some of their old jokes about how much it costs for men's clothes too. She said I wouldn't believe how much they had to lay out on Clyde's clothes so he'd be sure to look right when a suitable opening occurred. I could take the item of shirts alone that had to be made to order and cost seven-fifty each, to say nothing of collars and ties and suits from what Clyde said was the only tailor in New York that could dress a gentleman so he looked like one. She said if these funny humourists could see what they spent on her clothes and what they had to spend on Clyde's, she bet they'd feel mighty cheap. She laughed like she had a bully joke on the poor things.

She was glad, too, for Clyde's sake that a suitable

opening was just about to occur any moment, because the poor chap said himself it was a dog's life he was leading, with nothing much to do every day but go to the club and set round. And how thankful she'd ought to be that he never drank—the least bit of liquor made him ill—and so many young men of his class nowadays drank to excess.

No; nothing for me to say and nothing to do. Here was one happy love match. So I come home, making Vida promise to write often.

She did write about six times in the next three years. The chief fact standing out was that the right opening for Clyde hadn't opened yet—and he was getting more impatient every day. He always had something in view. But I judged he was far-sighted. And some way when he had got his rope over a job the hondoo wouldn't seem to render. He couldn't cinch anything. He was as full of blandishment as ever, though, and not a one of his staunch old friends had dropped him on account of his unfortunate marriage. He was a great diner-out and spent lots of week-ends, and just now was on a jolly houseboat in Florida for three months with an old college mate worth nine million dollars, and wasn't that nice! She could just see him keeping the whole party gay with his mandolin and his songs. The summer before that this same friend had let Clyde have an elegant motor car for his own use, and the foolish boy had actually took her out in it one Sunday, there being a pongee motor coat in the car that fit her beautifully so that none of his rich friends could have told she wasn't dressed as smartly as they was. He not only kept her out all afternoon, but would have took her to dinner some place only she had to get back to the boarding house because you couldn't trust these raw Swedes.

And there was one thing she was going to bring her-

self to confess to me, no matter if it did sound disloyal—a dreadful thing about Clyde. It was ugly of her to breathe a word against him, but she was greatly worried and mebbe I could help her. The horrible truth was that her boy was betraying an inclination to get fat, and he'd only laugh at her when she warned him. Many a night her pillow had been wet with tears on this account, and did I believe in any of these remedies for reducing? Wasn't there something she could slip into his pudding that would keep him down without his knowing it, because otherwise, though it was a thing no true wife ought to say, her beloved would dig his grave with his teeth.

I thought that was about enough and even ample. I started a hot answer to this letter, saying that if darling Clyde was digging his grave with his teeth it was her own fault because she was providing the spade and the burial plot, and the quickest way to thin her darling down would be for her to quit work. But shucks! Why insult the poor thing? I got back my composure and wrote her a nice letter of sympathy in her hour of great trouble. I didn't say at all that if I had been in her place Mr. Clyde would of long since had my permission to go to the devil. Yes, sir; I'd have had that lad going south early in the second year. Mebbe not at that! A woman never really knows how some other man might of made a fool of her.

Two more years drug on, with about two letters from Vida, and then I get a terrible one announcing the grand crash. First, the boarding house had died a lingering death, what from Vida buying the best the market afforded and not having learned to say "No!" to parties that got behind, and Clyde having had to lend a couple hundred dollars to a fraternity brother that was having a little hard luck. She'd run the business on a

narrow trail for the last two months, trying to guard every penny, but it got so she and Clyde actually had to worry over his next club dues, to say nothing of a new dress suit he was badly needing. Then some parties she owed bills to come along and pushed her over the cliff by taking her furniture. She was at first dreadfully worried about how her boy would stand the blow, but he'd took it like the brave, staunch man he was, being such a help to her when they had to move to a furnished room near the old home where they both had been so happy. He'd fairly made the place ring with his musical laughter and his merry jesting about their hardships.

Then she'd got a good job as cashier in a big grocery she'd dealt with, not getting a million dollars a year, to be sure, but they were doing nicely, because Clyde took most of his meals with his thoughtful friends—and then crash out of a clear sky a horrible tragedy happened that for a minute darkened the whole world.

Yes, it was a bitter tragedy. Clyde's two-year-old dress suit, that he was bravely wearing without a murmur, had needed pressing and she promised to do it; but she overslept herself till seven-thirty that morning, which made her late at the store, so she'd asked the girl in this rooming house to do it down in the kitchen. The girl had been willing but weak-minded. She started with too hot an iron and didn't put a damp cloth between the iron and the goods. In the midst of the job something boiled over on the stove. She got rattled and jumped for that, and when she come back the dress coat of darling Clyde was branded for fair in the middle of the back—a nifty flatiron brand that you could of picked him out of a bunch of animals by in one second. The girl was scared stiff and hung the clothes back in the closet without a word. And poor Clyde discovered the outrage that night when he

was dressing for a class reunion of his dear old Alvah Mater.

I had to read between the lines some, but I gathered that he now broke down completely at this betrayal of his trusting nature. Vida must of been suffering too keenly herself to write me all the pitiful details. And right on top of this blow comes the horrible discovery, when he takes his mandolin out of the case, that it has been fatally injured in the moving. One blow right on another. How little we realize the suffering that goes on all about us in this hard world. Imagine the agony in that furnished room this night!

Clyde wasn't made of iron. When the first flood of grief subsided he seems to of got cold and desperate. Said Vida in this letter: "My heart stopped when he suddenly declared in cool, terrible tones: 'There's always the river!' I could see that he had resolved to end it all, and through the night I pleaded with my boy."

I bet she made mistakes as a grocer's cashier next day, but it was worth it because her appeals to Clyde's better nature had prevailed. He did disappear that day, getting his trunks from the house while she was at the store and not being able to say good-bye because he couldn't remember which store she was accepting a situation at. But he left her a nice note. He wasn't going to end it all in the river. He was going off on the private steamboat of one of his dearest friends for a trip round the world that might last a year—and she mustn't worry about the silly old dress coat, because his new dinner-jacket suit would be ample for a boat trip. Also she'd be glad to know that he had a new mandolin, though she wasn't to worry about the bill for it, because the man didn't expect his pay on time and, anyway, he could wait, so with fondest love!

And Vida was so relieved at this good fortune. To think that her despondent boy was once more assured of his rightful position for a whole year, while she was saving her princely wages till she got enough to start another boarding house that would be more like a home. Wasn't it all simply too good to be true—wasn't it always darkest just before dawn!

I didn't trust myself to answer that letter, beyond wiring her that if she ever felt she was having any really hard luck to be sure and call on me. And she went on working and putting her money by. It was two years later when I next saw her. I looked her up the first thing when I got to New York.

She was still accepting a position in this grocery, but of course had changed to a much smaller furnished room where she could be cozy and feed herself from a gas stove on the simple plain foods that one just can't seem to get at high-priced restaurants.

She'd changed a lot. Lines in her face now, and streaks in her brown hair, and she barely thirty. I made up my mind to do something harsh, but couldn't just tell how to start. She'd had a picture card from her boy the first year, showing the Bay of Naples and telling how he longed for her; but six months later had come a despondent letter from Japan speaking again of the river and saying he often felt like ending it all. Only, he might drag out his existence a bit longer because another wealthy old chum was in port and begging him to switch over to his yacht and liven up the party, which was also going round the world—and maybe he would, because "after all, does anything in life really matter?"

That was the last line. I read it myself while Vida watched me, setting on her little iron bed after work one night. She had a plain little room with no windows

but one in the roof, though very tastefully furnished with photos of Clyde on every wall. The only other luxury she'd indulged in was a three-dollar revolver because she was deathly afraid of burglars. She'd also bought a hammer to shoot the revolver off with, keeping 'em both on the stand at the head of her bed. Yes; she said that was the way the man was firing it off in the advertisement—hitting it on a certain spot with a hammer. She was a reckless little scoundrel. She told me all about how to shoot a revolver while I was thinking up what to say about Clyde.

I finally said if he had ended it all she must cheer up, because it might be for the best. She considered this sadly and said she didn't believe dear Clyde had been prepared to die. I could see she was remembering old things that had been taught her in Sabbath school about God and wickedness and the bad place, so I cheered her on that point. I told her they hadn't been burning people for about thirty years now, the same not being considered smart any longer in the best religious circles. I also tried in a delicate manner to convince her that her boy would never end it all by any free act of his. I offered to bet her a large sum of money on this at any odds she wanted—she could write her own ticket. I said I knew men well enough to be certain that with this one it would be a long life but a merry one. Gee! The idea of this four-carder hurting himself!

And I had to cheer her up on another point. This was that she didn't have about three babies, all the image of their father. Yes, sir; she was grieving sorely about that. It give me a new line on her. I saw all at once she was mostly mother—a born one. Couldn't ever be anything else and hadn't ever really felt anything but mothersome to this here wandering treasure

of hers. It give me kind of a shock. It made me feel so queer I wanted to swear.

Well, I wrastled with that mulish female seven straight days to make her leave that twelve-hour job of hers and come out here with me. I tried everything. I even told her what with long hours and bum food she was making herself so old that her boy wouldn't give her a second look when he got back. That rattled her. She took hold of her face and said that massage cream would take all those silly lines out when she got time to rub it in properly; and as for the gray in her hair, she could never bring herself to use a dye, but if Clyde come back she might apply a little of the magic remedy that restores the natural colour. She also said in plain words that to come out here with me would look like deserting her boy. Do you get that?

"Dear Clyde is so sensitive," she says. "I couldn't bear the thought of his coming back and finding that I had left our home."

My work was cut for me, all right. I guess I'd failed if I hadn't been helped by her getting a sick spell from worry over what the good God would do to Clyde if he should end it all in some nasty old river, and from the grocery being sold to a party that had his own cashier. But I won, she being too sick to hunt another job just then. A least I got a fair compromise.

She wouldn't come here to live with me, but she remembered that Clyde had often talked of Southern California, where he had once gone with genial friends in a private car. He had said that some day when he had acquired the means he would keep a home there. So she was willing to go there herself and start a home for him. I saw it was the best I could get from her, so I applauded.

I says: "That's fine. You take this three hundred

and eighty dollars you got saved and I'll put a few dollars more with it and get you a little country place down there where you can be out of doors all day and raise oranges and chickens, and enough hogs for table use, and when the dear boy comes back he'll be awful proud of you."

"Oh, he always was that," says Vida. "But I'll go —and I'll always keep a light in the window for him."

And a lot of folks say women ought to vote!

So we start for Los Angeles, deserting Clyde just as mean as dirt. Sure, I went with her! I didn't trust her to finish the trip. As it was, she wanted to get off the train twice before we got to Chicago—thinking of the shock to her boy's tender heart if he should come back and find himself deserted.

But then, right after we left Chicago, she got interested. In the section across from us was a fifty-five-year-old male grouch with a few gray bristles on his head who had been snarling at everyone that come near him ever since the train left New York. The porters and conductors had got so they'd rush by him like they was afraid of getting bit on the arm. He had a gray face that seemed like it had been gouged out of stone. It was like one of these gargles you see on rare old churches in Europe. He was just hating everyone in the world, not even playing himself a favourite. And Vida had stood his growling as long as she could. Having at last give up the notion of tracking back to New York, she plumped herself down in the seat with this raging wild beast and begged for his troubles. I looked to see her tore limb from limb, instead of which in three minutes he was cooing to her in a rocky bass voice. His trouble was lumbago or pleurisy or some misery that kept him every minute in this pernickety state.

That was all old mother Vida needed to know. She

rustled a couple hot-water bags and kept 'em on the ribs of this grouch for about two thousand miles, to say nothing of doping him with asperin and quinine and camphor and menthol and hot tea and soothing words. He was the only son in sight, so he got it good. She simply has to mother something.

The grouch got a little human himself the last day out and begun to ask Vida questions about herself. Being one that will tell any person anything at all, she told him her life history and how her plans was now unsettled, but she hoped to make a home out on this coast. The grouch come right out and asked her how big her roll was, saying he lived out here and it cost something to make a home. Vida told him she had her two years' savings of three hundred and eighty good dollars and that I had promised to loan her a few dollars to piece out with. At this the old boy looked me over carefully and could see no signs of vast wealth because I never wear such in Pullman cars, so he warns her that I'll have to piece out her savings with a few thousand instead of a few dollars if she's to start anything worth keeping, because what they do to you in taxes down there is aplenty. After which he goes to sleep.

Vida moves over and asks what I meant by saying I'd only have to put in a few dollars when I must of known it would take a few thousand, and didn't I realize that Clyde would be hurt to the quick if he come back and found she hadn't been independent? She indignantly said she'd have to give up the country place and work till she had enough to start another home for paying guests.

I was so mad at this truthful grouch for butting in on my game that I up and told her flat she could never run a boarding house and make it pay; that no woman could who hadn't learned to say "No!" and she was

too much of a mushhead for that. She was quite offended by this and says firmness has always been considered a strong point in her personality. A first-class palmist had told her this only two weeks before. While we are squabbling back and forth the grouch wakes up again and says that he's in the moving-picture business and will give her a good job in the wardrobe department of the company he's with, so she must show up there at eight o'clock the next morning. Just like that! He didn't ask her. He told her.

Vida is kind of took off her feet, but mumbles "Yes, sir!" and puts his card in her bag. Me? I was too mad to talk, seeing the girl get into the mill again when I'd tried so hard to get her out. But I swore to myself I'd stick round and try to get some sense into the cup-custard she called her brain.

So the next morning I took her out to this moving-picture joint that they call a studio—not a bit like Metta Bigler's studio in Red Gap—and sure enough here's the grouch ready to put Vida on a job. The job is in a room about ninety feet long filled with boxes and sewing machines and shelves full of costumes, and Vida is to be assistant wardrobe mistress. Yes, sir; a regular title for the job. And the pay is twenty-five a week, which is thirteen more than she'd ever dreamed of making before. The grouch is very decent to her and tells everybody she's a friend of his, and they all pay polite attention to him because he's someone important in the works. It seems he's a director. He stands round and yells at the actors how to act, which I had always supposed they knew already but it seems not. Anyway, I left Vida there to get on to her new duties.

She was full of good reports that night about how well she'd got along, and how interesting the work was, and how she'd helped doctor up another boy. She said

he was one of the world's greatest actors, because if they give him four or five stiff drinks first he would fall off a forty-foot cliff backwards into the ocean. She'd helped bandage a sprained wrist for him that he got by jumping out of a second-story window in a gripping drama replete with punch and not landing quite right.

I said to myself it must be a crazy joint and she'd soon give up and let me get her a nice little place on the edge of town that I'd already looked over. So I let her go three days more, but still she stuck there with great enthusiasm. Then I had to be leaving for home, so the afternoon of the fourth day I went out to see for myself how things looked.

Vida is tickled to see me and takes me right in where they're beginning to act a gripping feature production. Old Bill Grouch is there in front of a three-legged camera barking at the actors that are waiting round in their disguises—with more paint on 'em than even a young girl will use if her mother don't watch her. The grouch is very polite to Vida and me and shows us where to stand so we won't get knocked over by other actors that are carrying round furniture and electric light stands and things.

They got a parlour in a humble home where the first scene is to be. There's a mother and a fair-haired boy of twenty and a cop that's come to pinch him for a crime. The play at this point is that the mother has to plead with the cop not to drag her boy off to a prison cell, and she has to do it with streaming eyes. It was darned interesting. The boy is standing with bowed head and the cop is looking sympathetic but firm, and mother is putting something into her eyes out of a medicine dropper. I whisper to Vida and she says it's glycerine for the tears. She holds her head back when

she puts 'em in and they run down her cheeks very life-like when she straightens up.

So mother comes forward with her streaming face and they're all ready to act when the grouch halts things and barks at the boy that he ain't standing right. He goes up and shows him how to stand more shamefully. But the tears on mother's face have dripped away and have to be renewed. She was a nice, kind-appearing mother all right, but I noticed she looked peeved when this delay happened. Vida explains that glycerine don't damage the eyes really, but it makes 'em smart a lot, and this actress, Miss St. Clair, has a right to feel mad over having to put in some more.

But she does it, though with low muttering when the grouch calls "All right, Miss St. Clair!" and is coming forward to act with this here second batch of tears when the grouch stops it with another barking fit. He barks at the policeman this time. He says the policeman must do more acting.

"You know you have a boy of your own," says he, "and how you'd hate to have him arrested for this crime, but you're also remembering that law is law and you're sworn to uphold it. Try to get that now. All ready, Miss St. Clair—we're waiting for you, Miss St. Clair!"

I'd watched this actress the second time her tears was spoiled and her expression didn't fit a loving mother's face one bit. Her breath come as in scenes of tense emotion, but she hotly muttered something that made me think I must of misunderstood her, because no lady actress would say it, let alone a kind old mother. However, she backs off and for the third time has this medicine dropper worked on her smarting eyes. Once more she comes forward with streaming eyes of motherly love, and I'm darned if this grouch don't hold things up again.

This time he's barking about a leather sofa against the far wall of the humble home. He says it's an office sofa and where in something is the red plush one that belongs to the set? He's barking dangerously at everyone round him when all at once he's choked off something grand by the weeping mother that has lost her third set of tears. She was wiping glycerine off her face and saying things to the grouch that must of give him a cold chill for a minute. I'm sometimes accused of doing things with language myself, but never in my life have I talked so interestingly—at least not before ladies. Not that I blamed her.

Everyone kept still with horror till she run down; it seems it's a fierce crime in that art to give a director what's coming to him. The policeman and the erring son was so scared they just stood there acting their parts and the grouch was frozen with his mouth half open. Probably he hadn't believed it at first. Then all at once he smiled the loveliest smile you ever seen on a human face and says in chilled tones: "That will be all, Miss St. Clair! We will trouble you no further in this production." His words sounded like cracking up a hunk of ice for the cocktail shaker. Miss St. Clair then throws up her arms and rushes off, shrieking to the limit of a bully voice.

It was an exciting introduction for me to what they call the silent drama.

Then I looked at Vida and she was crying her eyes out. I guessed it was from sympathy with the mother actress, but the grouch also stares at her with his gimlet eyes and says:

"Here, don't you waste any tears on her. That's all in the day's work."

"I—wasn't thinking of her," sobs Vida.

"Then what you crying for?" says he.

"For that poor dear boy that's being dragged from his mother to prison for some childish prank," she blubbers.

Me, I laughed right out at the little fool, but the director didn't laugh.

"Well, I'll be damned!" says he in low, reverent tones.

Then he begins to look into her face like he'd lost something there. Then he backed off and looked into it a minute more. Then he went crazy all over the place.

"Here," he barks at another actress, "get this woman into your dressing room and get the number five on her quick. Make her up for this part, understand? You there, Eddie, run get that calico skirt and black-satin waist off Miss St. Clair and hustle 'em over to Miss Harcourt's room, where this lady will be making up. Come on now! Move! Work quick! We can't be on this scene all day."

Then, when everybody run off, he set down on the red plush sofa that was now in place, relighted a cigar that smelled like it had gone out three days before, and grinned at me in an excited manner.

"Your little friend is a find," he says. "Mark my words, Mrs. Pettijohn, she's got a future or I don't know faces. She'll screen well, and she's one of the few that can turn on the tears when she wants to. I always did hate glycerine in this art. Now if only I can get her camera wise—and I'll bet I can! Lucky we'd just started on this piece when St. Clair blew up. Only one little retake, where she's happy over her boy's promotion in the factory. She's bound to get away with that; then if she can get the water again for this scene it will be all over but signing her contract."

I was some excited myself by this time, you'd better believe. Nervous as a cat I found myself when Vida

was led out in the sad mother's costume by this other actress that had made her up. But Vida wasn't nervous the least bit. She was gayly babbling that she'd always wanted to act, and once she had played a real part in a piece they put on at Odd Fellows' Hall in Fredonia, and she had done so well that even the Methodist minister said she was as good as the actress he saw in Lawrence Barrett's company before he was saved; and he had hoped she wouldn't be led away by her success and go on the real stage, because he could not regard it as a safe pursuit for young persons of her sex, owing to there being so little home life—and now what did she do first?

This director had got very cold and businesslike once more.

"Stop talking first," says he. "Don't let me hear another word from you. And listen hard. You're sitting in your humble home sewing a button on your boy's coat. He's your only joy in life. There's the coat and the button half sewed on with the needle and thread sticking in it. Sit down and sew that button on as if you were doing it for your own son. No pretending, mind you. Sew it on as if——"

He hesitated a minute and got a first-class inspiration.

"Sew it on as if it was a button on your husband's coat that you told me about. Every two or three stitches look up to show us how happy you are. When you get it sewed, take the coat up this way and hug it. You look still happier at that. Then you walk over to the mantel, pick up the photograph of your boy that's there by that china dog and kiss it. I won't tell you how to do that. Remember who he is and do it your own way, only let us see your face. Then put back the picture slowly, go get the coat, and start to the left as if you were going to hang it up in his room; but you hear

steps on the stair outside and you know your boy has come home from work. We see that because your face lights up. Stand happy there till he comes in.

"You expect him to rush over to you as usual, but he's cast down; something has happened. You get a shock of fright. Walk over to him—slow; you're scared. Get your arms round him. He stiffens at first, then leans on you. He's crying himself now, but you ain't—not yet. You're brave because you don't know about this fight he's had with the foreman that's after your boy's sweetheart for no good purpose.

"Now go through it that far and see if you remember everything I told you. When we get down to the crying scene after the officer comes on, I'll rehearse you in that too, only for God's sake don't cry in the rehearsal! You'll go dry. Now then! Coat—button—sewing. Go on!"

Well, sir, I stood there trembling like a leaf while she went through what he'd told her like she'd been at it all her life—or rather like it was her dear Clyde's coat and her dear Clyde's photo and her dear Clyde that come in the door. Then he rehearsed her in the end of the scene where the cop comes on, and she got that, too, though alarming him because she couldn't even rehearse it without crying. I could see this director was nervous himself by this time, thinking she was too good to be true. But he got her into the chair sewing again, all ready for the real work.

"Remember only three things," he says: "Don't look at this machine, move slowly when you move at all, and don't try to act. Now then! Camera!"

It was a historic occasion, all right. The lad at the camera begun to turn a crank and Vida begun to act like she wasn't acting at all. The director just give her a low word when she had to move. He didn't bark

now. And say, that crying scene! Darned if I didn't near cry myself looking at her, and I heard this stone-faced director breathing mighty short when she had to stand there with her hands clenched and watch her boy go out the door with this cop.

Vida was too excited to sleep that night. She said the director had advised her privately not to make a contract just yet, because she would get better terms when she'd showed 'em what she could really do. For this picture she would get paid seventy-five dollars a week. A week, mind you, to a girl that had been thinking herself lucky to get twelve in New York.

She was very let down and happy, and cried a little bit out of working hours for me because it was all so wonderful, and her drowned boy might be resting on some river bottom at that very moment. I said it was a safe bet he was resting, wherever he was; but she didn't get it and I didn't say it twice.

And such was the beginning of Vida Sommers' glittering sob career in the movies. She's never had but one failure and they turned that into a success. It seems they tried her in one of these "Should a Wife Forgive?" pieces in which the wife did not forgive, for a wonder, and she made a horrible mess of it. She was fine in the suffering part, of course, only when it come to not forgiving at the end—well, she just didn't know how to not forgive. They worked with her one whole day, then had to change the ending. She's said to be very noble and womanly in it.

I went home next day, leaving her in pursuit of her art. But I got glowing letters from her about every week, she doing new pictures and her salary jumping because other film parties was naturally after so good a weeper. And the next year I run down to see her. She was a changed woman all right. She had a home

or bungalow, a car, a fashionable dog, a Jap cook, a maid and real gowns for the first time in her life. But the changes was all outside. She was still the same Vida that wanted to mother every male human on earth. She never seemed to worry about girls and women; her idea is that they're able to look out for themselves, but that men are babies needing a mother's protection as long as they live.

And of course one of these men she had mothered down there had took a base advantage of her—this same ugly old grouch of a director. She locked the bedroom door and told me about it in horrified whispers the first night I got there. She said it might of been her fault, that he might of misunderstood something she had said about Clyde. And anyway she'd ought to of remembered that some men are beasts at heart.

Anyway, this infamous brute had come to the house one night and insulted her in the grossest manner, and it was all true about moving-picture directors having designs on unprotected females that work for 'em. Yielding to his lowest brute instincts he had thrown decency to the winds and made her such an evil proposition that she could hardly bear to put it in words. But she did. It seems that the scoundrel had listened to some studio gossip to the effect that she had divorced the husband who deserted her, and so he come right out and said he had been deeply in love with her ever since that first day on the train, and now that she was free, would she marry him?

Of course she was insulted to the limit and told him so in what would probably of made a gripping scene of a good woman spurning the advances of a moral leper. She overwhelmed him with scorn and horror for his foul words. How dared he say her Clyde had deserted her, or think she would ever divorce him! That showed

what a vile mind he must have. She said he got awful meek and apologetic when he learned that she still clung to the memory of Clyde, who would one day fight his way back to her if he hadn't ended it all. She told him fully what a perfect man Clyde was, and she said at last the ugly old wretch just grinned weakly at her in a very painful way, like it hurt him, and said: "Oh, my dearest, you must try to forgive me. I didn't know—I didn't know half the truth." Then he patted her hand and patted her cheek and choked up and swallowed a couple of times, and says he:

"I was an old man dreaming and dreams make fools of old men!"

Then he swallowed again and stumbled out through her garden where the orange blossoms had just come. She said he'd never been offensive since that time, barking as nasty to her as to any of the others when she was acting, so that no one would dream what a foul heart he had, except that he always kept a bunch of white roses in her dressing room. But she hadn't cared to make him trouble about that because maybe he was honestly trying to lead a better life.

Some entertainment Vida give me, telling this, setting on her bed under a light that showed up more lines than ever in her face. She was looking close to forty now—I guess them crying scenes had told on her, and her yearning for the lost Clyde—anyway she was the last woman on earth could of got herself insulted even if she had tried her prettiest, only she didn't know that. And she'd had her little thrill. We've all dreamed of how we'd some day turn down some impossible party who was overcome by our mere beauty.

I said I'd always known this director was an unspeakable scoundrel, because he insisted on calling me Mrs. Pettijohn.

Then we had a nice talk about Clyde. She'd had no word for a year now, the last being a picture card saying he would spend the winter in Egypt with some well-known capitalists that wouldn't take no for an answer. And did I believe he might now he wandering over the face of the earth, sick and worn, and trying to get back to her; didn't I think some day he would drag himself to her door, a mere wreck of his former self, to be soothed at last on her breast? That was why she kept a light burning in the front window of this here bungalow. He would know she had waited.

Well, I'd never said a word against Clyde except in conversation with myself, and I wasn't going to break out now. I did go so far as to hint that an article that had come out about her in this same magazine might draw Clyde back a little quicker than the light in the window. The article said her salary was enormous. I thought its rays might carry.

So I come home again and near a year later I get a telegram from Vida: "Happy at last—my own has come home to me." I threw up my hands and swore when I read this. The article had said her salary was seven hundred and fifty dollars a week.

The next winter I run down to see the happy couple. Vida was now looking a good forty, but Clyde was actually looking younger than ever; not a line nor a wrinkle to show how he had grieved for her, and not a sign of writer's cramp from these three picture cards he had sent her in five years. She'd been afraid he'd come back worn to the bone.

But listen! By the time I got there Clyde was also drawing money. He'd felt a little hurt at first to find his wife a common actress, and asked to see her contract because you couldn't believe what you see in these magazines. Then he'd gone round the lot and got to

be an actor himself. I gathered that he hadn't been well liked by the men at first, and two or three other directors, when Vida insisted he should have a chance to act, had put him into rough-house funny plays where he got thrown downstairs or had bricks fall on him, or got beat up by a willing ex-prize fighter, or a basket of eggs over his head, or custard pies in his perfect features, with bruises and sprains and broken bones and so forth—I believe the first week they broke everything but his contract.

Anyway, when he begun to think he wasn't meant for this art, who steps in but this same director that had made such a beast of himself with Vida? He puts Clyde into a play in which Vida is the mother and Clyde is the noble son that takes the crime on his shoulders to screen the brother of the girl he loves, and it was an awful hit. Naturally Vida was never so good before and Clyde proved to be another find. He can straighten up and look nobler when he's wrongfully accused of a crime than any still actor I ever see. He's got now to where they have to handle him with gloves or he'd leave 'em flat and go with another company. Vida wrote me only last week that they had a play for him where he's cast off on a desert island with a beautiful but haughty heiress, and they have to live there three months subsisting on edible foods which are found on all desert islands. But Clyde had refused the part because he would have to grow whiskers in this three months. He said he had to think of his public, which would resent this hideous desecration. He thought up a bully way to get out of it. He said he'd let the whiskers grow for a few scenes and then find a case of safety razors washed ashore, so he could shave himself just before the haughty millionaire's daughter confessed that she had loved him from the first and the excursion

steamer come up to rescue 'em. I believe he now admits frankly that he wrote most of the play, or at least wrote the punch into it. A very happy couple they are, Clyde having only one vice, which is candy that threatens his waistline. Vida keeps a sharp watch on him, but he bribes people to sneak chocolate creams into his dressing room. The last night I was there he sung "Good-night, Good-night, Beloved!" so well that I choked up myself.

Of course women are crazy about him; but that don't bother Vida a little bit. She never wanted a husband anyway—only a son. And Clyde must have had something wake up in his brain them years he was away. He had a queer look in his eyes one night when he said to me—where Vida couldn't hear: "Yes, other women have loved me, but she—she knows me and loves me!" It's the only thing I ever heard him utter that would show he might be above a pet kitten in intellect.

And, of course, these letters he gets don't mean anything in his life but advertising—— Oh, yes! I forgot to tell you that his stage name is J. Harold Armytage. He thought it up himself. And the letters coming in by the bushel really make Vida proud. In her heart she's sorry for the poor fools because they can't have as much of dear Clyde as she has. She says she's never deserved her present happiness. I never know whether I agree with her or not.

She's a queer one. Darned if she don't make a person think sometimes—listening to her chatter—that there must be something kind of decent about human nature after all!

III

RED GAP AND THE BIG-LEAGUE STUFF

I WAITED beside Ma Pettengill at the open door of the Arrowhead ranch house. It was a moment of tranquil expectancy; presently we would be summoned to the evening meal. Down by the barn a tired janizary pumped water into a trough for two tired mules still in harness. Halfway down the lane, before a mirror tacked to the wall beside the bunk-house door, two men hurriedly combed their damp hair. Blackbirds were still noisy in the poplars. In the field at our left a lazy lot of white-faced cattle, large and placid, lolled or grazed on the new spring grass.

Surveying these cattle with a fond eye—had she not that day refused all of three hundred and twenty-five dollars a head for a score of these pure-bred cows?—my hostess read me a brief lecture on the superior fleshing disposition of the Hereford. No better rustler under range conditions, said she, accumulating flesh at all ages, storing it in seasons of plenty to draw on in seasons of want. Hadn't I noticed how common cows got paunchy and how well the fat was distributed on the pure-breds?

I had not noticed, cows being more or less cows to me, but I was prepared to look with deep respect upon any cow for which three hundred and twenty-five dollars could be sanely refused, and I now did so. I was told that I forgot their calves, which would be worth a hundred and sixty dollars the day they were weaned.

This made it all more impressive. I looked respectfully again at the bulky creatures, though listening, too, for the stealthy-stepping Lew Wee; a day in the thin spring air along a rocky trout stream had made even cattle on the hoof suggestive.

Ma Pettengill, with a last proud look at her jewels, swept the panoramic camera of her eye round to the blacksmith shop on our right. Before it were strewn the mutilated remains of four wood wagons. I had lately heard the lady have words with Abner, the blacksmith, concerning repairs to these. Abner himself had few of the words. They were almost entirely his employer's. They were acutely to the effect that these here wagons would be running again before the week was out or she would know the reason why. The aggrieved Abner had tried to suggest that this reason she would know would not be the right reason at all, because wasn't he already working like a beaver? Possibly, said the lady. And beavers might be all right in their place. What she needed at this precise time was someone working like a blacksmith—someone!

Over her shoulder she had flung the word at him, blackened with emphasis.

"Any one hurt in the runaway?" I asked, observing her glance to linger upon this snarl of wagon parts.

"Four wagons was mortally hurt," said the lady, "but of course not a mule skinner touched. Talk about charmed lives! Besides, they wasn't accidents; they was just incidents. It was part of our winter sports."

"I didn't know you had winter sports up here."

"I didn t either till I got down to Red Gap last winter and found out that was what we had been having. Here I been gritting along winter after winter, calling it work, and come to find out it's what parties go a long distance to indulge in and have to wear careful

clothes for it. Yes, sir; society is mad about it. Red Gap itself was mad about it last winter, when it got a taste of the big-league stuff. Next winter I'll try to get the real sporting spirit into this gang of sedentaries up here; buy 'em uniforms and start a winter-sports club. Their ideal winter sport so far is to calk up every chink in the bunk house, fill the air-tight stove full of pitch pine and set down with a good book by Elinor Glyn. They never been at all mad about romping out in the keen frosty air that sets the blood tingling and brings back the roses to their wan cheeks.

"Take last winter. Not knowing it was sport it seemed at times like toil. First it snowed early and caught a lot of my cows and calves in the mountains. While we sported round with these, working 'em down into the valley, the weather changed. It snowed harder. Just oodles of the most perfectly darling snow. Then distemper broke out among the saddle horses. Then being already shorthanded, what does the fool vaquero boss do but pick a splinter out of his thumb with a pin and get blood poison enough to lay him off? Too much trouble for cussing. I tried that out scientifically. So I had to get out and make a hand. If I heard someone say I did as much as any three of these molly-coddles up here I'd just simper in silence and look down. Only I wish I'd known it was a fashionable winter sport. I'd of been more carefree.

"Then come the best of our winter sports—wood hauling through the drifts over a rocky road down the mountains. My lands, but it was jolly! On a quiet day there'd be only one runaway, one wagon fetched to the shop in sections, like a puzzle. Then another day all hands would seem to be quite mad about the sport, and nothing but the skinners and the mules would get back to camp that night—with the new outfit of

harness and the hoodlum wagon going back next morning to see what could be salvaged.

"Finally we got the cows and calves home, got our wood in and started a general rodeo for the dry stock—Nature's fleecy mantle getting thicker every minute. And none of us ever suspecting that it was a sport only the wealthy have a right to. If I'd suggested building an ice palace as a sporty wind-up I'll bet the help wouldn't of took it right. Anyway, I didn't. With everything under shelter or fence at last I fled down to Red Gap, where I could lead a quiet life suitable to one of my years—where I thought I could."

From the doorway Lew Wee softly called, "You come now!' We both heard him. Inside my hostess stealthily closed the door upon the gentle spring night; closed and locked it. Furtively she next drew curtains over the two windows. Then, candle in hand, she went lightly across the big living room to a stern and business-like safe that stands against the farther wall. Kneeling before this she rapidly twirled the lock to a series of mystic numbers and opened the formidable doors.

"Leave us keep the home fires burning," said she impressively, and withdrew from an exposed cavern a bottle of Scotch whisky. Standing before the safe we drank chattily. We agreed that prohibition was a good thing for the state of Washington. We said we were glad to deny ourselves for the sake of those weaker natures lacking self-control, including Mr. Bryan, whom the lady characterized as "just a water-spout."

The bottle restored to security my hostess shut the thick doors upon it and twirled the lock. Then she raised the curtains and reopened the door to the innocent spring night, after which we sat to our meatless and wheatless repast. In place of meat we sternly contented ourselves with stewed chicken, certain of the

Arrowhead fowls having refused to do their bit in eggs and now paying the penalty in a crisis when something is expected from everyone. In place of wheat we merely had corn muffins of a very coaxing perfection. Even under these hardships I would patriotically practice the gospel of the clean plate.

As her exploring spoon wandered over the platter of half-submerged chicken Ma Pettengill casually remarked that carefree Bohemians was always the first to suffer under prohibition, and that you couldn't have a really good Latin Quarter in a dry town. I let it go. I must always permit her certain speeches of seeming irrelevance before she will consent to tell me all. Thus a moment later as she lavished valuable butter fat upon one of the spirituelle muffins she communicated the further item that Cousin Egbert Floud still believed Bohemians was glass blowers, he having seen a troupe of such at the World's Fair. He had, it is true, known some section hands down on the narrow gauge that was also Bohemians, but Bohemians of any class at all was glass blowers, and that was an end of it. No use telling him different, once he gets an idea into his poor old head.

This, too, I let pass, overcome for the moment by the infatuating qualities of the chicken stew. But when appetites, needlessly inflamed by the lawless tippling, had at last been appeased and the lady had built her first cigarette I betrayed a willingness to hear more of the hinted connection between winter sports and Latin Quarters peopled by Bohemians, glass-blowing or otherwise. The woman chuckled privately through the first cigarette, adeptly fashioned another, removed to a rocking-chair before the open fire and in a businesslike fervour seized a half-knitted woollen sock, upon which she fell to work.

She now remarked that there must be along the Front millions of sweaters and wristlets and mufflers and dewdads that it looked well to knit in public, so it seemed to be up to her to supply a few pairs of socks. She said you naturally couldn't expect these here society dames that knitted in theatres and hotel corridors to be knitting anything so ugly as socks, even if they would know how to handle four needles, which they mostly wouldn't; but someone had to do it. Without the slightest change of key she added that it was a long story and painful in spots, but had a happy ending, and she didn't know as she minded telling me.

So I come down to Red Gap about December first hoping to hole up for the winter and get thoroughly warmed through before spring. Little did I know our growing metropolis was to be torn by dissension until you didn't know who was speaking to who. And all because of a lady Bohemian from Washington Square, New York City, who had crept into our midst and started a Latin Quarter overnight. The first day I was downtown I overheard two ladies saying something about the new Latin Quarter. That mystified me, because I knew the town had been lidded tight since Lon Price went out of office as mayor. Then I meet Mrs. Judge Ballard in the Boston Cash Store and she says have I met a Miss Smith from New York who is visiting here. I said I had not. It didn't sound exciting. Some way "a Miss Smith" don't excite you overly, no matter where she hails from. So I dismissed that and went on with my shopping. Next I meet Egbert Floud, who is also down for the winter to rest beside a good coal stove, and we ask each other what's the good word and is anything new. Cousin Egbert says nothing is new in Red Gap except a Bohemian

glass blower from Grinitch Village, New York. He says he ain't seen her blow glass yet, but he's going some night, because them Bohemian glass blowers down to the fair was right fascinating, and don't I think Grinitch is a bum name for a town? He says when I see this glass blower I'll feel like asking animal, vegetable, or mineral, because he has seen her in the post office with Metta Bigler and she looks like a nut.

I tell the poor old zany he sounds simple-minded himself and I can't make a lick of sense out of what he's said, except I know this village ain't spelled that way. He's telling me that's the way it's spoken anyway, and about how he brought home a glass watch chain that these Bohemians blowed at the fair, when along come Metta Bigler herself and stops to shake hands, so Cousin Egbert slinks off.

I got to tell you about Metta. She's our artist; gives lessons in oil painting and burnt wood and other refinements. People can take six lessons off Metta and go home and burn all the Indian heads on leather sofa pillows that you'd ever want to see. Also she can paint a pink fish and a copper skillet and a watermelon with one slice cut out as good as any one between here and Spokane. She's a perfectly good girl, falling on thirty, refers to herself without a pang as a bachelor girl, and dresses as quiet as even a school-teacher has to in a small town.

Well, Metta rushes up to me now, all glowing and girlish, and says I must come to her studio that very afternoon and meet her dear old chum, Vernabelle Smith, that is visiting her from Washington Square, New York. She and Vernabelle met when they were completing their art education in the Latin Quarter of Chicago, and Vernabelle had gone down to New York and got into all the new movements and among people

who was doing things, and was now very, very advanced, being what you might call an intellectual; but I would be sure to like her because she was so delightfully Bohemian, not standing on ceremony but darting straight to the heart of life, which is so complex to most of us who live within convention's shell and never get in touch with the great throbbing centre of things. She didn't say what things. It was a new line of chatter from Metta. Usually she'd have been telling me her troubles with Chinese help, or what a robber the Square Deal meat market was, or, at the most, how her fruit-and-fish piece had carried off the first prize of twenty dollars at the Kulanche County Fair.

So I say I'll be sure to look in on her and her new friend. I reckoned she must be the Miss Smith and the glass blower I'd already heard about that morning. Of course "Miss Smith" didn't sound like much, but Vernabelle Smith was different. That name Vernabelle made all the difference in the world. You sort of forgot the ensuing Smith.

That same afternoon about four P.M. I dropped round to the Bigler house. Metta's mother let me in. She's a neat and precise old lady with careful hair, but she looked scared as she let me in and led me to the door of Metta's studio, which is a big room at the back of the house. She didn't go in herself. She pulled it open and shut it on me quick, like it was a lion's den or something.

All the curtains was down, candles lighted, and the room not only hot but full of cigarette smoke and smoke from about forty of these here punk sticks that smoldered away on different perches. It had the smell of a nice hot Chinese laundry on a busy winter's night. About eight or ten people was huddled round the couch, parties I could hardly make out through this

gas attack, and everyone was gabbling. Metta come forward to see who it was, then she pulled something up out of the group and said "Meet dear Vernabelle."

Well, she was about Metta's age, a short thirty, a kind of a slaty blonde with bobbed hair—she'd been roached fore and aft—and dressed mostly in a pale-blue smock and no stockings. Nothing but sandals. I could hardly get my eyes off her feet at first. Very few of our justly famous sex can afford to brave the public gaze without their stockings on. Vernabelle could ill afford it. She was skinny, if you know what I mean, lots of tendons and so forth, though I learned later that Vernabelle called it being willowy. She had slaty-gray eyes and a pale, dramatic face with long teeth and a dignified and powerful-looking nose. She was kind of hungry-looking or soulful or something. And she wore about two yards of crockery necklace that rattled when she moved. Sounded like that Chinaman with his dishes out there in the kitchen. I learned later that this was art jewellery.

Vernabelle greeted me with many contortions like she was taking an exercise and said she had heard so much about me and how interesting it was to meet one who did things. I said I was merely in the cattle business. She said "How perfect!" and clasped her hands in ecstasy over the very idea. She said I was by way of being the ideal type for it. And did I employ real cowboys; and they, too, must be fascinating, because they did things. I said they did if watched; otherwise not. And did I acquire an ascendancy over their rough natures. I said we quickly parted forever if I didn't do that. Then she clanked across to the couch, where she set down on her feet. I give her credit for that much judgment. That girl never did just plain set down. It was either on one foot or on both feet,

or she draped herself along the furniture to show how willowy she could be without its hurting.

She now lighted a new cigarette from her old one and went on telling the fish-faces about her how little colour she had found here. She said we was by way of being a mere flat expanse in dull tints. But what could be expected of a crude commercialism where the arts was by way of being starved. Ah, it was so different from dear old Washington Square, where one was by way of being at the heart of life. It took me some time to get this by-way-of-being stuff, but the others was eating it up. Metta Bigler hovered round proud as Lucifer and trying to smoke for the first time in her life, though making poor work of it, like she was eating the cigarette and every now and then finding bits she couldn't swallow, and holding it off at arm's length in between bites. Mrs. Henrietta Templeton Price was making better work of the cigarettes, and Beryl Mae Macomber, a wealthy young society heiress and débutante, aged seventeen, was saying that she had always felt this lack in Red Gap and would of been in the movies long since if her aunt had listened to reason.

The only man present was Edgar Tomlinson, who is Red Gap's most prominent first-nighter and does the Lounger-in-the-Lobby column for the *Recorder*, reviewing all the new films in an able and fearless manner. Edgar was looking like he had come into his own at last. He was wearing a flowing tie and a collar that hardly come higher than his chest and big wind shields on a black cord, and had his hair mussed up like a regular Bohemian in a Sunday paper. Vernabelle was soon telling him how refreshing it was to meet away out here one who was by way of doing things, and she had read that very morning his review of the film entitled A Sister of Sin, and had found it masterly in its clear-cut

analysis, but why did he waste himself here when the great world lay open. Edgar thrust back his falling hair with a weary hand and tried to look modest, but it was useless. Vernabelle devoted most of her chat to Edgar. She was an incessant person but it seemed to take a man to bring out all that was best in her.

Pretty soon Metta went over to a table and brought back some glasses of wine on a tray, of which all partook with more or less relish. I recognized it from the bottle. It was elderberry wine that Metta's mother had put up. You have to be resourceful in a dry state.

"I'm afraid you'll all think me frightfully Bohemian," said Metta proudly.

Beryl Mae held her glass up to the light and said, "After all, does anything in life really matter?" She appeared very blasé in all her desperate young beauty. She and Edgar Tomlinson looked as near right as anything you'd see in Washington Square. Vernabelle said the true spirit of Bohemia knew neither time nor place; it was wherever those gathered who were doing things, and wasn't it splendid that even here in this crude Western town a few of the real sort could meet and make their own little quarter and talk about the big things, the lasting things! Everyone said yes, quite so; and they all tried to handle their wine like it was a rare old vintage. But you can't hold much wassail on the juice of the elderberry; it ain't the most jocund stuff in the world as fermented by Metta's mother.

However, it livened things up a bit and Vernabelle set down her glass and chattered some more. She said after all life was anything but selective, but didn't we think that all the arts rounded out one's appreciation of the beautiful. Several said "How true—how true indeed!" and sighed importantly. Then Metta said Vernabelle must show us some of her work and

Vernabelle said she could hardly bring herself to do that; but yet she could and did, getting up promptly. She had designs for magazine covers and designs for war posters and designs for mural decorations and designs for oil paintings and so forth—"studies; crude, unfinished bits" she called 'em, but in a tone that didn't urge any one else to call 'em that.

It was mostly clouds and figures of females, some with ladies' wearing apparel and many not, engaged in dancing or plucking fruit or doing up their hair. Quite different stuff from Metta's innocent pictures of kittens and grapes and daffodils. After everyone was put on the easel Henrietta Templeton Price would stick her thumb up in the air and sight across it with one eye shut and say "A stunning bit, that!" and the others would gasp with delight and mutter to each other about its being simply wonderful.

Vernabelle listened in an all-too-negligent manner, putting in a tired word or two now and then. She admitted that one or two was by way of being precious bits. "Rather precious in an elemental way," she would say. "Of course I am trying to develop the psychology of the line." Everyone said "Oh, of course!"

While she had one up showing part of a mottled nude lady who was smiling and reaching one hand up over to about where her shoulder blades would meet in the back, who should be let in on the scene but Lon Price and Cousin Egbert Floud. Lon had called for Henrietta, and Cousin Egbert had trailed along, I suppose, with glass blowing in mind. Vernabelle forgot her picture and fluttered about the two new men. I guess Lon Price is a natural-born Bohemian. He took to her at once.

"Sit here and tell me all about yourself," says Verna-

belle, and Lon did so while the girl hung breathless on his words. In no time at all he was telling her about Price's Addition to Red Gap, how you walk ten blocks and save ten dollars a block and your rent money buys a home in this, the choicest villa site on God's green earth. Vernabelle had sort of kept hold of Cousin Egbert's sleeve with an absent hand—that girl was a man hound if ever there was one—and pretty soon she turned from Lon to Egbert and told him also to tell her all about himself.

Cousin Egbert wasn't so glib as Lon. He looked nervous. He'd come expecting a little glass blowing and here was something strange. He didn't seem to be able to tell her all about himself. He couldn't start good.

"Tell me what you are reading, then," says Vernabelle; and Cousin Egbert kind of strangled at this, too. He finally manages to say that he tried to read Shakespere once but it was too fine print. The old liar! He wouldn't read a line of Shakespere in letters a foot high. It just showed that he, too, was trying to bluff along with the rest of 'em on this Bohemian chatter.

Vernabelle continued full of blandishment for the two men and poured 'em out stiff hookers of this demon elderberry wine and lighted cigarettes for 'em from hers. I don't know whether this beverage got to Lon Price or not, but in a minute he was telling her that beauty in her sex was a common-enough heritage, but how all-too rare it was to find beauty and brains in the same woman! Vernabelle called him comrade after that, and then she was telling Cousin Egbert that he was of the great outdoors—a man's man! Egbert looked kind of silly and puzzled at this. He didn't seem to be so darned sure about it.

Then Vernabelle worked over by the easel—it took

her about six attitudes leaning against things, to get there—and showed her oil paintings to the newcomers. Lon Price was full of talk and admiration and said she must do a poster for him showing a creature of rare beauty up in the clouds beckoning home-buyers out to Price's Addition, where it was Big Lots, Little Payments, and all Nature seemed to smile. He said this figure, however, had better have something in the shape of a garment on it because the poster would go into homes where art in its broader extent was still regarded in a suspicious or even hostile manner, if she caught what he meant. The artist says she can readily understand, and that life after all is anything but selective.

Cousin Egbert just looked at the pictures in an uncomfortable manner. He spoke only once and that was about the mottled lady reaching over her shoulder and smiling. "Grinitch," says he with a knowing leer. But Vernabelle only says, yes, it was painted in the dear old village.

Then the crowd sort of got together on the couch and in chairs and Vernabelle talked for one and all. She said how stimulating it was for a few of the real people who did things to come together in this way after the day's turmoil—to get away from it all! Beryl Mae said she had often wanted to get away from it all, but her aunt was narrow-minded. Henrietta Price lighted her ninth cigarette and said how it reminded her of the Latin Quarter of Paris, which she had never been to, but her cousin had spent a whole afternoon there once and had been simply wild about it. Vernabelle said it was times like this, with a few real people, that she got her biggest ideas; that life in the rough was too terribly a labyrinth, didn't we think, stunning one with its immensity, while in these dear little half-lighted moments

the real came out unafraid, if we understood what she meant. Many of us said we did.

It was when we got up to go that Vernabelle told me things about Cousin Egbert. She said he must have great reserve strength in his personality. She said he fairly frightened her, he was so superbly elemental.

"It is not so much Mr. Floud that frightens me," says she, "as the inevitability of him—just beautifully that! And such sang fraw!"

Poor Egbert was where he had to overhear this, and I had never seen him less sang fraw—if that's the word. He looked more like a case of nettle rash, especially when Vernabelle gripped his hand at parting and called him comrade!

We finally groped our way through the smoke of the door and said what a lovely time we'd had, and Metta said we must make a practice of dropping in at this hour. Vernabelle called us all comrade and said the time had been by way of being a series of precious moments to her, even if these little studio affairs did always leave poor her like a limp lily. Yep; that's the term she used and she was draped down a bookcase when she said it, trying to look as near as possible like a limp lily.

The awestruck group split up outside. Nothing like this had ever entered our dull lives, and it was too soon to talk about it. Cousin Egbert walked downtown with me and even he said only a few little things. He still called the lady a glass blower, and said if she must paint at all why not paint family pictures that could be hung in the home. He said, what with every barroom in the state closed, there couldn't be much demand for them Grinitch paintings. He also said, after another block, that if he owned this lady and wanted to get her in shape to sell he'd put her out on short sand grass, short almost to the roots, where she'd wear her teeth

down. And a block later he said she hadn't ought to be calling everyone comrade that way—it sounded too much like a German. Still and all, he said, there was something about her. He didn't say what.

So now the Latin Quarter had begun, and in no time at all it was going strong. It seemed like everybody had long been wanting to get away from it all but hadn't known how. They gathered daily in Metta's studio, the women setting round in smocks, they all took to wearing smocks, of course, while hungry-eyed Vernabelle got the men to tell her all about themselves, and said wasn't it precious that a few choice spirits could thus meet in the little half-lighted hour, away from it all, and be by way of forgetting that outer world where human souls are bartered in the market place.

Of course the elderberry wine was by way of giving plumb out after the second half-lighted hour, but others come forward with cherished offerings. Mrs. Dr. Percy Hailey Martingale brought round some currant wine that had been laid down in her cellar over a year ago, and Beryl Mae Macomber pilfered a quart of home-made cherry brandy that her aunt had been saving against sickness, and even Mrs. Judge Ballard kicked in with some blackberry cordial made from her own berries, though originally meant for medicine.

Lon Price was a feverish Bohemian from the start, dropping in almost every day to tell Vernabelle all about himself and get out of convention's shell into the raw throb of life, as it was now being called. Lon always was kind of light-minded, even after the state went dry. He told Vernabelle he had a treasured keep-sake hid away which he would sacrifice to Bohemia at the last moment, consisting of one quart bottle of prime old rye. And he was going to make over to her a choice

building lot in Price's Addition, right near the proposed site of the Carnegie library, if Vernabelle would put up something snappy on it in the way of a Latin Quarter bungalow.

Lon also added Jeff Tuttle to the Bohemians the day that old horned toad got down from his ranch. After going once Jeff said darned if he hadn't been a Bohemian all his life and never knew what was the matter with him. Vernabelle had him telling her all about himself instantly. She said he was such a colourful bit, so virile and red-blooded, and she just knew that when he was in his untamed wilderness he put vine leaves in his hair and went beautifully barefoot. She said it wasn't so much him as the inevitability of him. She'd said this about Cousin Egbert, too, but she was now saying of this old silly that he had a nameless pathos that cut to her artist's heart. It seems Cousin Egbert had gone round a couple times more looking for glass blowing and getting disappointed.

And there was new Bohemians every day. Otto Gashwiler, that keeps books for the canning factory, and Hugo Jennings, night clerk of the Occidental Hotel, was now prominent lights of the good old Latin Quarter passing their spare moments there where they could get away from it all, instead of shaking dice at the Owl cigar store, like they used to. And Oswald Cummings of the Elite Bootery, was another. Oswald is a big fair-haired lummox that sings tenor in the Presbyterian choir and has the young men's Bible class in the Sabbath School. Vernabelle lost no time in telling him that he was oh, so frankly a pagan creature, born for splendid sins; and Otto seemed to believe it for a couple of weeks, going round absent like as if trying to think up some sins that would be splendid, though if any one but a Bohemian had told him this he'd have

blushed himself to death. It shows you what a hold Vernabelle was by way of getting on Red Gap.

It was sure one season of triumph for Metta Bigler, who lurked proudly in the background as manager. Metta's mother wasn't near so thrilled as Metta, though. She confided to me that Bohemians was a messy lot to clean up after, raining cigarette ashes over everything; and also it was pretty hard to have raised a child to Metta's age only to see her become a cigarette fiend overnight, and having these mad revels with currant wine and other intoxicants—and Metta was even using a lip stick!

And Metta's mother wasn't the only one in town looking sidewise at these Bohemian doings. There was them that held aloof from the beginning and would give their bitter reasons at every opportunity. These was the ultra-conservative element of the North Side set, and what they said about the new Latin Quarter was a plenty. They said it was mostly an excuse for drunken orgies in which all sense of decency was cast aside, to say nothing of cigarettes being brazenly smoked by so-called ladies. They said this here talk about getting away from it all meant the ruin of the home upon which all durable civilization must be built; and as for wives and mothers going round without their stockings, look at what befell proud Rome! And it was time something was done to stem this tide of corruption.

Mrs. Cora Wales and Mrs. Tracy Bangs, president and vice-president of our anti-tobacco league, was the leaders of this movement and sent in a long complaint to the chamber of commerce urging instant action or a foul blot would be splashed on the fair name of our city, to say nothing of homes being broken up. They was ably backed up in this move by a committee from the civic purity league.

And of course this added to the attractions of the Latin Quarter, giving each Bohemian a new thrill. Vernabelle said it was by way of being ancient history; that from time immemorial these little groups of choice spirits who did things had been scorned and persecuted, but that every true Bohemian would give a light laugh and pursue his care-free way, regardless of the Philistine. And so it went, venomous on both sides, but with Vernabelle holding the bridge. She'd brought new stuff to town and had a good working majority in favour of it.

Downtown one day I met Metta in the Red Front grocery buying olives and sardines in an excited way. I suppose it's for one of her unspeakable orgies, but she tells me it's something special and I must be sure to come.

"Dear Vernabelle," she says, "has consented to give an evening cycle of dance portrayals for just a few of the choicer spirits. I know there has been dreadful talk about our little group, but this will be a stunning bit and you are broad-minded, so do come."

I could just see Vernabelle consenting, almost peevishly; but it sounded like it might be disorderly enough, so I says I'll come if she promises to leave at least one window down at the top, me not having a gas mask.

Metta thinks a minute, then says she guesses she can leave one window down a mite; not much, on account of the nature of Vernabelle's dance costume. I says if such is to be the nature of her costume I'll come anyway and risk being gassed. Metta chides me gravely. She says the costume is perfectly proper to the artist eye, being a darling little early Greek thing; built on simple lines that follow the figure, it is true, yet suggest rather than reveal, and if the early Greeks saw no harm in it why should we? I tell her to say no more, but

reserve me a ringside seat, though near a window if one can be opened; say, as far as the early Greeks would have done at such a time, on account of the punk sticks.

And of course I wouldn't miss it. I'm there at eight-thirty and find quite a bunch of Latin Quarter denizens already gathered and full of suppressed emotion. The punk sticks, of course, are going strong. Vernabelle in a pink kimono says they supply atmosphere; which is the only joke I ever heard her get off, if she knew it was one. Bohemians Lon Price and Jeff Tuttle are hanging over the punch bowl, into which something illegal has been poured. Jeff is calling Vernabelle little woman and telling her if worse comes to worst they might try being Bohemians on a mixture his men up on the ranch thought of for a New Year's celebration. He says they took a whole case of vanilla extract and mixed it with one dozen cans of condensed milk, the vanilla having a surprising kick in it and making 'em all feel like the good old days next morning.

Vernabelle says he reminds her of some untamed creature of the open, some woodsy monster of the dells, and Jeff says that's just what he feels like. He's going on to tell her some more about what he feels like, but Vernabelle is now greeting Oswald Cummings, the pagan of splendid sins, from the Elite Bootery. She tells Oswald there is a cold cruelty in the lines of his face that reminds her of the emperor Nero.

Finally about twenty choice spirits who did things was gathered for this half-lighted hour, so everybody set down on chairs and the couch and the floor, leaving a clear space for Vernabelle; and Professor Gluckstein, our music teacher, puts down his meerschaum pipe and goes to the piano and plays a soft piece. The prof is a German, but not a pro-German, and plays first rate in the old-fashioned way, with his hands. Then, when

all the comrades get settled and their cigarettes lighted, the prof drifted into something quite mournful and Vernabelle appeared from behind a screen without her kimono.

The early Greeks must of been strong on art jewellery. Vernabelle clanked at every step with bracelets and anklets and necklaces. She had a priceless ruby weighing half a pound fastened to the middle of her bony forehead. Her costume was spangled, but not many spangles had been needed. The early Greeks couldn't of been a dressy lot. If Vernabelle had been my daughter I could of give her what she deserved with almost no trouble. The costume, as Metta had said, not only followed the lines of the figure, so far as it went anywhere at all, but it suggested and almost revealed that Vernabelle had been badly assembled. The Bohemians kind of gasped and shivered, all except Jeff Tuttle, who applauded loudly. They seemed to feel that Vernabelle was indeed getting away from it all.

Then came this here cycle-of-dance portrayals. The first one wasn't much dance; it was mostly slow, snaky motions with the arms and other things, and it was to portray a mother cobra mourning her first-born. At least that's the way I understood it. Another one was called "The Striving Soul," to which the prof played something livelier. Vernabelle went round and round, lifting her feet high. It looked to me like she was climbing a spiral staircase that wasn't there. Then she was a hunted fawn in a dark forest and was finally shot through the heart by a cruel hunter—who was probably nearsighted. And in the last one she was a Russian peasant that has got stewed on vodka at the Russian county fair. This was the best one. You couldn't see her so well when she moved quick.

Of course there was hearty applause when it was all

over, and pretty soon Vernabelle come out again in her kimono. Panting like a tuckered hound she was when the comrades gathered to tell her how wonderful she had been.

"That music tears me, ' says Vernabelle, putting her hands to her chest to show where it tore. "That last maddening Russian bit—it leaves me like a limp lily!" So she was led to the punch bowl by Comrades Price and Tuttle, with the others pushing after and lighting cigarettes for her.

It was agreed that the evening had been a triumph for Vernabelle's art. Almost every Bohemian present, it seemed, had either been tore or maddened by that last Russian bit.

Vernabelle was soon saying that if she had one message for us it was the sacred message of beauty. Jeff Tuttle says, "You've certainly delivered it, little woman!" Vernabelle says, oh, perhaps, in her poor, weak way—she was being a limp lily against the piano then—but art is a terrible master to serve, demanding one's all. Comrade Price says what more could she give than she has to-night. And then, first thing I know, they're all talking about an intimate theatre.

This was another part of Vernabelle's message. It seems intimate theatres is all the rage in New York, and the Bigler barn is just the place to have one in. Vernabelle says they will use the big part where the hay used to be and paint their own scenery and act their own plays and thus find a splendid means of self-expression the way people of the real sort are doing in large cities.

Everyone is wild about this in a minute, and says how quaint and jolly Bohemian it will be. The Bigler barn is just the place, with no horse there since Metta bought one of the best-selling cars that ever came out of Michigan, and Vernabelle says she has written a

couple of stunning little one-act pieces, too powerful for the big theatres because they go right to the throbbing raw of life, and it will be an inspiration and uplift to the community, of which all present can be proud. Lon Price says he will furnish a good drop curtain free, painted with a choice nine-room villa with just a line mentioning Price's Addition to Red Gap, Big Lots, Little Payments. And he's quite hurt when Vernabelle tells him no, that they must keep entirely out of the slime of commercialism. I don't think Lon ever again felt the same toward Vernabelle—calling his business slime, that way.

However, the party broke up full of plans for the new intimate theatre, leaving an empty punch bowl and a million cigarette ends.

And right here was where the Philistine opposition braided feathers in its hair and done a war dance. Members of the little group that did things spoke freely the next day of Vernabelle's art in the dance and her early Greek costume, taking a mean enjoyment in the horror they inspired among pillars of the church and the civic purity league. It is probable that in their artistic relish they endowed Vernabelle with even fewer clothes than she had wore. At any rate, they left a whole lot to be inferred, and it promptly was inferred.

The opposition now said this was no job for a chamber of commerce; it had become a simple matter for the police. The civic purity league had a special meeting at which the rind was peeled off Vernabelle's moral character, and the following Sabbath one of the ministers gave a hot sermon in which the fate of Babylon and a few other undesirable residence centres mentioned in the Bible was pointed out. He said that so-called Bohemia was the gateway to hell. He never minced his words, not once.

And the Latin Quarter come in for some more shock assaults when the talk about an intimate theatre in the Bigler barn got out. The regular theatre was bad enough, said the civic purity league; in fact, they had started a campaign against that the month before, right after a one-night engagement of the Jolly Paris Divorcées Burlesque Company, which, I gathered, had not upheld the very highest standards of dramatic art. And if the town was going to stand for anything more intimate than this show had provided, why, it was time for drastic action if any wholesome family life was to be saved from the wreck.

Feeling ran high, I want to tell you, and a few of the younger set fell out of the ranks of good old Bohemia—or was yanked out. Luella Stultz's father, who is old-fashioned, it was said, had give Luella a good licking for smoking cigarettes, and old Jesse Himebaugh had threatened his daughter Gussie with the reform school if she didn't stop trying to get away from it all. Even Beryl Mae's aunt put her foot down. Beryl Mae met me in the post office one day and says auntie won't let her be a Bohemian any more, having threatened to take her new ukulele away from her if she goes to that Latin Quarter another single time; and poor Beryl Mae having hoped to do a Hawaiian dance in native costume for the intimate theatre, where it wouldn't be misunderstood!

Things was just in this shape, with bitterness on every side and old friends not speaking, and the opposition passing the Bohemians on the street with the frown of moral disgust, and no one knowing how it would all end, when I hear that Cora Wales has a niece coming from New York to visit her—a Miss Smith. I says to myself, "My lands! Here's another Miss Smith from New York when it looks to me like the one we got is

giving us a plenty of the big-league stuff." But I meet Cora Wales and learn that this one's first name is Dulcie, which again seemed to make a difference.

Cora says this Dulcie niece is one of New York's society leaders and she's sorry she invited her, because what kind of a town is it in which to introduce a pure young girl that never smoked or drank in her life and whose people belong to one of the very most exclusive churches in the city. She had hoped to give Dulcie a good time, but how can she sully herself with any of our young people that have took up Bohemianism? She being fresh from her social triumphs in New York, where her folks live in one of the very most fashionable apartment houses on Columbus Avenue, right in the centre of things and next to the elevated railway, will be horrified at coming to a town where society seems to be mostly a little group of people who do things they hadn't ought to.

Dulcie is a dear girl and very refined, everything she wears being hand-embroidered, and it would of been a good chance for Red Gap to get acquainted with a young society girl of the right sort, but with this scandal tearing up the town it looks like the visit will be a failure for all parties.

I tell Cora on the contrary it looks like a good chance to recall the town to its better self. If this here Dulcie is all that is claimed for her she can very probably demolish the Latin Quarter and have us all leading correct society lives in no time, because the public is fickle and ever ready for new stuff, and as a matter of fact I suspect the Latin Quarter is in a bad way because of everything in town of an illegal character having been drunk up by the comrades. Me? I was trying to get some new life into the fight, understand, being afraid it would die natural and leave us to a dull winter.

Cora's eyes lighted up with a great hope and she beat it off to the *Recorder* office to have a piece put in the paper about Dulcie's coming. It was a grand piece, what with Cora giving the points and Edgar Tomlinson writing it. It said one of Gotham's fair daughters would winter in our midst, and how she was a prominent society leader and an ornament of the fast hunting set, noted for her wit and beauty and dazzling costumes, and how a series of brilliant affairs was being planned in her honour by her hostess and aunt, Mrs. Leonard Wales, Red Gap's prominent society matron and representative of all that was best in our community, who would entertain extensively at her new and attractive home in Price's Addition. And so forth.

I'm bound to say it created a flurry of interest among the younger dancing set, and more than one begun to consider whether they would remain loyal to Bohemia or plunge back into society once more, where stockings are commonly wore, and smoking if done at all is hurriedly sneaked through out on the porch or up in the bathroom.

From Cora's description I was all prepared to find Dulcie a tall, stately creature of twenty-eight, kind of blasé and haggard from her wearing social duties in New York. But not so. Not so at all. Cora had invitations out for a tea the day after Dulcie come; invitations, that is, to the non-Bohemians and such as had reformed or give good signs of it. I don't know which head I got in under. And this Dulcie niece was nothing but a short, fat, blond kid of seventeen or eighteen that had never led any society whatever. You could tell that right quick.

She was rapidly eating cream-cheese sandwiches when I was presented to her. I knew in one look that society had never bothered Dulcie any. Victuals was

her curse. In the cattle business it ain't riding disrespectful horses that gets you the big money; it's being able to guess weights. And if Dulcie pulled a pound less than one hundred and eighty then all my years of training has gone for naught. She was certainly big-framed stock and going into the winter strong. Between bites of sandwich, with a marshmallow now and then, she was saying that she was simply crazy about the war, having the dandiest young French soldier for a godson and sending him packages of food and cigarettes constantly, and all the girls of her set had one, and wasn't it the darlingest idea.

And her soldier was only twenty-two, though his beard made him look more mature, and he wrote such dandy letters, but she didn't suppose there would ever be anything between them because papa was too busy with his coal yard to take her over there.

As the girl chattered on it didn't seem to me that our Latin Quarter was in the slightest danger from her. Still, some of the girls that was there seemed quite impressed or buffaloed by her manner. One idea she give out now was new in Red Gap. She had all her rings named after meals. She had a breakfast ring and a dinner ring and a supper ring and a banquet ring, and Daisy Estelle Maybury admired the necklace she had on, and Dulcie said that was a mere travelling necklace; and how did they like this cute little restaurant frock she was wearing? A little dressmaker over on Amsterdam Avenue had turned it out. All the parties she dealt with, apparently, was little. She had a little dressmaker and a little hair woman and a little manicure and a little florist, and so forth. She'd et five cream-cheese sandwiches by this time, in spite of its being quite painful for her to pick up a dropped napkin. Dulcie didn't fold over good. You could tell here was

a girl that had never tried to get away from it all. She wanted to be right where it was.

Pretty soon one of the girls said something about the Bohemians of the Latin Quarter, probably aiming to show this New York chatterbox that Red Gap wasn't so far west as it looked. But Dulcie gave 'em the laugh. She said oh, dear, New York society had simply quit taking up Bohemians, it not being considered smart any longer, and did we really take them up here? The girls backed up at this. And Dulcie went on being superior. She said of course society people now and then made up a party and went down to Washington Square to look them over, but as for taking them up, oh, dear, no! It was more like a slumming party. One could stare at them, but one simply didn't know them.

And perhaps, if she could get Aunt Cora to chaperon them, they might make up one of these slumming parties some evening and go down to Red Gap's Latin Quarter; it might be amusing. Cora Wales glistened at this. She said she guessed people could now see how such goings-on were regarded by society in the true sense of the word. And it did give the girls a chill, calling the Bigler home a slum. But I still didn't see any stuff in Dulcie to vanquish Vernabelle.

And I didn't see it a minute later when Dulcie wolfed her tenth marshmallow and broke out about winter sports. She first said what perfectly darling snow we had here. This caused some astonishment, no one present having ever regarded snow as darling but merely as something to shovel or wade through. So Dulcie pronged off a piece of sticky chocolate cake and talked on. She said that everyone in New York was outdooring, and why didn't we outdoor. It was a shame if we didn't go in for it, with all this perfectly

dandy snow. New York people had to go out of town for their winter sports, owing to the snow not being good for sport after it fell there; but here it was right at hand, and did we mean to say we hadn't organized a winter-sports club.

No one spoke, for no one could guess what you did to outdoor properly. About all they could think of was hustling out after another chunk for the fireplace or bringing a scuttle of coal up from the cellar. But they soon got the idea. Dulcie said right from this window she could see a corking hill for a toboggan slide, and it would be perfectly darling to be out there with plenty of hot coffee and sandwiches; and there must be some peachy trips for snowshoe parties with sandwiches and coffee at the end; or skating in the moonlight with a big bonfire and coffee and sandwiches.

She suggested other things with coffee and sandwiches and finally got up some real enthusiasm when she said she had brought some of the dearest sport toggery with her. The girls was excited enough when they found out you had to dress especial for it. They was willing to listen to anything like that if New York society was really mad about it, even if it conflicted with lifelong habits—no one in Red Gap but small boys having ever slid downhill.

And still I didn't suspect Dulcie was going to groundsluice Vernabelle. It looked like the Latin Quarter would still have the best of it, at least during a cold winter. Which goes to show that you can't tell what society will go mad about, even in Red Gap, when you can dress for it.

The girls had got a line on Dulcie and was properly impressed by her, and then with an evening affair at the Wales home the dancing men had their chance. Even some of the Bohemians was let to come, just to

have 'em see that there was indeed a better life; and reports of Dulcie was such that all took advantage of it. The male sex was strong for the girl at once. She didn't know that life is anything but selective, or that all the arts round out one's appreciation of the beautiful, or that anything was "by way of being" something. But all the food she took didn't make her torpid; she giggled easily and had eyes like hothouse grapes, and in spite of her fat there was something about her, like Cousin Egbert said of Vernabelle. Anyway, she prevailed. Oswald Cummings, the pagan, for one, quickly side-stepped his destiny of splendid sins, and Hugo Jennings told Dulcie he had merely gone to this Latin Quarter as he would go to an animal show, never having meant for one moment to take Bohemians up, any more than New York society would.

First thing I hear, the winter-sports club has been organized, snowshoes sent for and a couple of toboggans, and a toboggan slide half a mile long made out in Price's Addition, starting at the top of the highest hill, where Lon's big board sign with the painted bungalow made a fine windshield, and running across some very choice building lots to the foot of the grade, where it stopped on the proposed site of the Carnegie Library. Lon was very keen about the sport himself after meeting Dulcie, and let a fire be built near his sign that burned it down one night, but he said it was all good advertising, more than he'd ever got out of being a Bohemian.

Of course there was a great deal of fuss about the proper sport toggery, but everyone got rigged out by the time the toboggans got there. Dulcie was a great help in this and was downtown every day advising one or another about the proper sweaters or blanket coats or peaked caps with tassels, or these here big-eyed boots. You'd meet her in a store with Stella Ballard,

eating from a sack of potato chips; and half an hour later she'd be in another store with Daisy Estelle Maybury, munching from a box of ginger wafers; with always a final stop at the Bon Ton Kandy Kitchen for a sack of something to keep life in her on the way home. There really got to be so much excitement about winter sports that you hardly heard any more talk about the Latin Quarter. People got to speaking to each other again.

By the opening day of the sports club you wouldn't of thought any one in town had ever tried to get away from it all. Even them that thought it crazy came and stood round and said so. Cousin Egbert Floud said this Dulcie was some sparrow, but nutty—going out in the cold that way when nothing drove her out. Dulcie made a great hit with the club this first day, having the correct Canadian toggery and being entirely fearless in the presence of a toboggan. She'd zip to the bottom, come tramping back, shooting on all six, grab a sandwich—for not a morsel of food had passed her lips since she went down the time before—and do it all over again. And every last ex-Bohemian, even Edgar Tomlinson, fighting for the chance to save her from death by starvation! Dulcie played no favourites, being entranced with 'em all. She said they was the dearest gentleman friends she'd ever had. The way they was fighting for her favours she could of called 'em her gentleman frenzy. Ain't I the heinous old madcap, thinking of jokes like that?

Next day there was a snowshoe trip up to Stender's spring and back by way of the tie camp. Dulcie hadn't ever snowshoed and it wasn't any light matter when her shoes threw her down—requiring about three of the huskiest boys to up-end her—but she was game and the boys was game and she was soon teaching snow-

shoes how to take a joke. And from that on winter sports ruled in Red Gap. The chamber of commerce even talked of building an ice palace next year and having a carnival and getting the town's name in the papers. Oh, there certainly must of been a surprised lot of snow round there that winter. Nothing like this had ever happened to it before.

And all being done on nothing stronger than coffee, with hardly a cigarette and never anything that was by way of being a punk stick in a closed room. It was certainly a lot healthier than a Latin Quarter for these young people, and for the old ones, too. Dulcie had sure put one large crimp into Bohemia, even if she could not be justly called an intellectual giantess.

And Vernabelle knew who to blame, too, when the little group quit coming round to get away from it all. She knew it was Dulcie. She said that Dulcie seemed to be a pampered society butterfly that devoted all her thoughts to dress. This was repeated to Dulcie by an ex-Bohemian, but she found no poison in it. She said of course she devoted all her thoughts to dress; that a young girl with her figure had to if she ever expected to get anywhere in the world.

Even ex-comrade Lon Price would now shut his office at four o'clock every day and go up on the hill and outdoor a bit, instead of getting away from it all in a smoky Bohemian way. Besides he'd had a difference of opinion with Vernabelle about the poster she was doing for him, the same being more like an advertisement for some good bath soap, he said, than for choice villa sites.

"I don't know anything about art," says Lon, "but I know what my wife likes." Which left Vernabelle with another design on her hands and brought Comrade Price out of Bohemia.

Even if Dulcie's winter sports hadn't done the trick I guess it would of been done easy by her report that Bohemians was no longer thought to be smart in New York, Red Gap being keenly sensitive in such matters. Metta Bigler's mother firmly turned out the half-lights in Bohemia when she heard of this talk of Dulcie's. I don't blame her. She didn't one bit relish having her neat home referred to as a slum, say nothing of having her only child using a lip stick and acting like an abandoned woman with cigarettes and the wine cup.

She said just that to me, Metta's mother did. She said she had heard that New York was all broken up into social sets, the same way Red Gap is, and if Bohemians wasn't being took up by the better element in New York, then they shouldn't be took up by the better element of Red Gap—at least not in any home of which the deed was still in her name. She said of course she couldn't keep Metta's guest from being a Bohemian, but she would have to be it alone. She wasn't going to have a whole mob coming round every day and being Bohemians all over the place, it being not only messy but repugnant alike to sound morality and Christian enlightenment. And that settled it. Our town was safe for one more winter. Of course God only knows what someone may start next winter. We are far off from things, but by no means safe.

Cousin Egbert was kind of sorry for Vernabelle. He said if she'd just stuck to plain glass blowing she might of got by with it. He's a wonder, that man—as teachable as a granite bowlder.

My Godfrey! Ten-thirty, and me having to start the spring sport of ditch cleaning to-morrow morning at seven! Won't I ever learn!

IV

VENDETTA

BY THE evening lamp in the Arrowhead living room I did my bit, for the moment, by holding a hank of gray wool for Ma Pettengill to wind. While this minor war measure went forward the day's mail came. From a canvas sack Lew Wee spilled letters and papers on the table. Whereupon the yarn was laid by while Ma Pettengill eagerly shuffled the letters. She thought fit to extenuate this eagerness. She said if people lived forever they would still get foolishly excited over their mail; whereas everyone knew well enough that nothing important ever came in it. To prove this she sketched a rapid and entirely unexciting summary of the six unopened letters she held.

One of them, she conceded, might be worth reading; and this she laid aside. Of the remaining five she correctly guessed the contents of four. Of the fifth she remarked that it would be from a poor feckless dub with a large family who had owed her three hundred dollars for nine years. She said it would tell a new hard-luck tale for non-payment of a note now due for the eighth time. Here she was wrong. The letter inclosed a perfectly new note for four hundred and fifty dollars; and would Mrs. Pettengill send on the extra one hundred and fifty dollars that would enable the debtor to get on his feet and pay all his debts, as there was a good season of hog buying ahead of him!

"I guessed wrong," admitted the lady. "I certainly

did that little man an injustice, not suspecting he could think up something novel after nine years." Grimly she scanned the new note. "As good as a treaty with Germany!" she murmured and threw it aside, though I knew that the old note and the new hundred and fifty would go forward on the morrow; for she had spoken again of the debtor's large family. She said it was wonderful what good breeders the shiftless are.

"Ain't I right, though, about the foolish way people fly at their mail?" she demanded. "You might think they'd get wise after years and years of being fooled; but—no, sir! Take me day after to-morrow, when the next mail comes. I'll fall on it like I fell on this, with all my old delusions uninjured. There sure does seem to be a lot of human nature in most of us."

Then she opened the possibly interesting letter that had been put aside. The envelope, at least, was interesting, bearing as it did the stamp of a military censor for the American Expedition to France.

"You remember Squat Tyler, that long cow-puncher working for me when you were here last time?"

I remembered Squat, who was indeed a long cow-puncher—long enough to be known, also, to his intimates as Timberline.

"Well, Squat is over there in the trenches helping to make the world a pleasant place to live in. He's a good shot, too."

The lady read the letter hurriedly to herself; then regaled me with bits of it.

"'The life here is very,'" she read. "That's all he says, at first—'The life here is very.' I should judge it might be that from what I read in the papers. Or mebbe he couldn't just think of the word. Let's see! What else? Oh, yes—about digging. He says he didn't take to digging at first, not having gone there for

any common purpose, but one day he was told to dig, and while he was thinking up something to say a million guns began to go off; so he dug without saying a word. Hard and fast he says he dug. He says: 'If a badger would of been there he would of been in my way.' I'll bet! Squat wouldn't like to be shot at in all seriousness. What next? Here he says I wouldn't dream what a big outfit this here U. S. outfit is; he says it's the biggest outfit he ever worked for—not even excepting Miller & Lux. What next? Oh, yes; here he tells about getting one.

"'Last night I captured a big fat enemy; you know—a Heinie. It was as dark as a cave, but I heard one snooping close. I says to my pardner I keep hearing one snoop close; and he says forget it, because my hive is swarming or something; and I says no; I will go out there and molest that German. So I sneaked over the bank and through our barbed-wire fence that everyone puts up here, and out a little ways to where I had heard one snoop; and, sure enough—what do you think? He seen me first and knocked my gun out of my hands with the butt of his. It got me mad, because it is a new gun and I am taking fine care of it; so I clanched him'—that's what Squat says, clanched. 'And, first, he run his finger into my right eye, clear up to the knuckle it felt like; so I didn't say a word, but hauled off quick and landed a hard right on the side of his jaw and dropped him just like that. It was one peach I handed him and he slumped down like a sack of mush. I am here to tell you it was just one punch, though a dandy; but he had tried to start a fight, so it was his own fault. So I took all his weapons away and when he come alive I kicked him a few times and made him go into the U. S. trenches. He didn't turn out to be much—only a piano tuner from Milwaukee; and I wish it had of been a gen-

eral I caught snooping. I certainly did molest him a-plenty, all right. Just one punch and I brought him down out of control. Ha! Ha! The life here is very different.'

"There; that must of been what he tried to say at the beginning—'The life here is very different.' I should think he'd find it so, seeing the only danger that boy was ever in here was the sleeping sickness."

Hereupon the lady removed the wrapper from a trade journal and scanned certain market quotations. They pleased her little. She said it was darned queer that the war should send every price in the world up but the price of beef, beef quotations being just where the war had found them. Not that she wanted to rob any one! Still and all, why give everyone a chance but cattle raisers? She muttered hugely of this discrimination and a moment later seemed to be knitting her remarks into a gray sock. The mutterings had gradually achieved the coherence of remarks. And I presently became aware that the uninflated price of beef was no longer their burden.

They now concerned the singular reticence of all losers of fist fights. Take Squat's German. Squat would be telling for the rest of his life how he put that Wisconsin alien out with one punch. But if I guessed the German would be telling it as often as Squat told it I was plumb foolish. He wouldn't tell it at all. Losers never do. Any one might think that parties getting licked lost their powers of speech. Not so with the winners of fights; not so at all!

At this very minute, while we sat there in that room at a quarter past eight, all over the wide world modest-seeming men were telling how they had licked the other man with one punch, or two or three at the most. It was being told in Kulanche County, Washington, and

in Patagonia and Philadelphia and Africa and China, and them places; in clubs and lumber camps and Pullman cars and ships and saloons—in states that remained free of the hydrant-headed monster, Prohibition—in tents and palaces; in burning deserts and icy wastes. At that very second, in an ice hut up by the North Pole, a modest Eskimo was telling and showing his admiring wife and relatives just how he had put out another Eskimo that had come round and tried to start something. Which was another mystery, the man winning the fight being always put upon and invariably in the right. In every one of these world-wide encounters justice always prevailed and only the winner talked about it afterward.

"And lots of times," continued the lady, "this talkative winner has been set upon by as many as three others. But he licks 'em all. Sometimes he admits he had a little luck with the third man; but he gets two of the cowards easy. Why, down in Red Gap only the other night I saw a kind of a slight young man in a full-dress suit lick three big huskies that set on him. He put two out with a punch apiece and got the third after about one round of sparring. There he stood winner over all three, and hardly his hair mussed; and you wouldn't of thought in the beginning that he could lick one of the bunch. It was a good picture, all right, with this fight coming in the first reel to start things off lively. But what I want to know is why, out of these million fights that come off, you never hear a word out of a loser! I'll bet all my Liberty Bonds right now that you never yet heard a man tell about how he was licked in a fair fight."

I had to decline the wager. The most I could submit was that I had heard some plausible excuses. The lady waved her entire knitting in deprecation.

"Oh, excuses! You hear 'em a-plenty when the loser can't deny he was licked. Most losers will odd things along till they sound even. I heard a lovely excuse down in Red Gap. Hyman Leftowitz, who does business there as Abercrombie, the Quality Tailor, made a suit for Eddie Pierce that drives the depot hack, and Eddie was slow pay. So Hyman lost his native tact one night and dunned Eddie when he was walking down Fourth Street with his girl. Eddie left his girl in at the Owl Drug Store and went back and used Hyman hard; and all Hyman did was to yell 'Help!' and 'Murder!' I was in his shop for a fitting next day and Hyman's face arrested the attention much more than usual. It showed that Eddie had done something with him. So I says: 'Why didn't you fight back? What was your fists for?' And Hyman says: 'I pledge you my word I didn't know it was a fight.' Oh, excuses—sure! But that ain't what I'm getting at. You've heard the winners talk, like we all have, how they did it with the good old right hook to the jaw, or how they landed one straight left and all was over; but did you ever hear any talk from a loser without excuses, one who come out plain and said he was licked by a better man?"

We debated this briefly. We agreed that the reticence of losers is due to something basic in human nature; a determination of the noblest sort to disregard failure—that is, Ma Pettengill said you couldn't expect everything of human nature when it had its earrings in, and I agreed in as few words as would suffice. I had suddenly become aware that the woman was holding something back. The signs in her discourse are not to be mistaken. I taxed her with this. She denied it. Then she said that, even if she was holding back something, it was nothing to rave about. Just an anecdote that this here talk about fighting characters had reminded

her of. She wouldn't of thought of it even now if Ben Steptoe hadn't told her last spring why he didn't lick his Cousin Ed that last time. And this here Ed Steptoe was the only honest male she had ever known. But that was because something was wrong in his head, he being a born nut. And it wasn't really worth going back over; but—well—she didn't know. Possibly. Anyway——

These Steptoe cousins come from a family back in the East that was remote kin to mine and they looked me up in Red Gap when they come out into the great boundless West to carve out a name for themselves. About fifteen years ago they come. Ben was dark and short and hulky, with his head jammed down between his shoulders. Ed was blond and like a cat, being quick. Ben had a simple but emphatic personality, seeing what he wanted and going for it, and that never being more than one thing at a time. Ed was all over the place with his own aspirations and never anything long at a time; kind of a romantic temperament, or, like they say in stories, a creature of moods. He was agent for the Home Queen sewing machine when he first come out. But that didn't mean sewing machines was his life work. He'd done a lot of things before that, like lecturing for a patent-medicine professor and canvassing for crayon portraits with a gold frame, and giving lessons in hypnotism, and owning one-half or a two-headed pig that went great at county fairs.

Ben had come along the year before Ed and got a steady job as brakeman on the railroad, over on the Coeur d'Alene Branch. He told me he was going to make railroading his life work and had started in at the bottom, which was smart of him, seeing he'd just come off a farm. They probably wouldn't of let him start in

at the top. Anyway, he was holding down his job as brakeman when Ed sailed in, taking orders for the Home Queen, and taking 'em in plenty, too, being not only persuasive in his methods but a wizard on this here sewing machine. He could make it do everything but play accompaniments for songs—hemming, tucking, frilling, fancy embroidering. He knew every last little dingus that went on it; things I certainly have never learned in all my life, having other matters on my mind. He'd take a piece of silk ribbon and embroider a woman's initials on it in no time at all, leaving her dead set to have this household treasure.

But Ed had tired of sewing machines, like he had of hypnotism and the double-headed Berkshire; and he never kept at anything a minute after it quit exciting him. Ben come down to Red Gap to see his cousin and they had quite a confab about what Ed should next take up for his life work. Ben said it was railroading for his, and some day he'd be a general manager, riding round in his private car and giving orders right and left, though nothing but a humble brakeman now, and finally he talked Ed into the same exalted ambitions. Ed said he had often wanted to ride in a private car himself, and if it didn't take too long from the time you started in he might give railroading a chance to show what it could do for him. Ben said all right, come over with him and he'd get him started as brakeman, with a fine chance to work up to the top.

So, after infesting a few more houses with the Home Queen, Ed went into his new profession. He told me, the last thing, that, even if he didn't stick till he got to the top, it was, anyway, a fine chance for adventure, which was really the thing he had come west of Chicago for. He said night and day he pined for adventure.

He got his adventure right soon after the company's

pay roll was adorned with his name. He'd been twisting up brakes on freight cars for ten days till the life looked tame to him, even with a private car at the end, and then all his wildest dreams of adventure was glutted in something like four minutes and thirty seconds. On this eleventh day after he'd begun at the bottom he started to let two big freight cars loaded with concentrates down the spur track, from one of the mines at Burke, having orders to put 'em where the regular train for Wallace could pick 'em up. Burke is seven miles up the cañon from Wallace and the grade drops two hundred and thirty-five feet to the mile, being a masterpiece of engineering. Ed gets his two cars to the main line, all right, whistling a careless ditty. Then when they should of stopped they did not. They kept sneaking and creaking along on him. He couldn't get the brake of the forward car up very tight, and in setting the brake of the rear car, with a brakeman's stick for a lever, he broke the chain. Then his two cars really started out looking for adventure.

Ed admits that he had the thrill of his life for seven miles. I guess his wildest cravings for adventure was appeased for the time. He flattened out at the rear end of the last car and let the scenery flash by. He said afterward it looked just one blurred mess to him. His two cars dropped the sixteen hundred and forty-five feet and made the seven-mile distance in four and one-half minutes by standard railroad time. Ed was feeling fairly good, never having rode so fast in his life before, and he was hoping nothing serious would get in the way before the cars slowed up on a level somewhere. He didn't have long to hope this. His cars struck a frog at the upper end of the Wallace yard and left the track. The forward ends plowed into the ground and the rear ends swung over. Ed was shot through the air two

hundred and thirty-five feet, as afterward measured by a conscientious employee of the road, and landed in a dump of sawdust by the ice house.

It seems Ben was working in the Wallace yard that day and was the first man to look things over. He put a report on the wire promptly and had a wrecking outfit there to minister to these two injured box cars, and a gang of Swedes repairing the track in no time at all. Then someone with presence of mind said they ought to look for Ed, and Ben agreed; so everybody searched and they found him in this sawdust. He looked extremely ruined and like this little adventure had effected structural modifications in him. He certainly had been brought down out of control, like Squat says, but he was still breathing; so they took him over to the Wallace Hospital on a chance that he could be put together again, like a puzzle. A doctor got to work and set a lot of bones and did much plain and fancy sewing on Ed the adventurer.

So there he was, bedfast for about three months; but, of course, he begun to enjoy his accident long before that—almost as soon as he come to, in fact. It seemed to Ed that there had never been so good an accident as that in the whole history of railroading, and he was the sole hero of it. He passed his time telling the doctor all about it, and any one else that would drop in to listen: just how he felt when the cars started downhill; how his whole past life flashed before him and just what he was thinking about when the cars poured him off. He was remembering every second of it by the time he was able to get on crutches. He never used that old saying about making a long story short.

First thing he did when he could hobble was to take a man from the resident engineer's office out to the point where he'd left the rails and tape his flight, finding it to

be two hundred and thirty-five feet. That hurt his story, because he had been estimating it at five hundred feet; but he was strictly honest and accepted the new figures like a little man.

That night Ben come in, who'd been up round Spokane mostly since the accident, and Ed told him all about it; how his flight was two hundred and thirty-five feet. And wasn't it the greatest accident that ever happened to anybody?

Ed noticed that Ben didn't seem to be excited about it the way he had ought to be. He was sympathetic enough for Ed's bone crashes, but he said it was all in the day's work for a railroad man; and he told Ed about some other accidents that was right in a class along with his and mebbe even a shade better. Ed was peeved at this; so Ben tried to soothe him. He said, yes, indeed, all hands had been lucky—especially the company. He said if them two cars hadn't happened to strike soft ground that took the wheels they'd been smashed to kindling; whereas the damage was trifling. This sounded pretty cold to Ed. He said this railroad company didn't seem to set any exaggerated value on human life. Ben said no railroad company could let mere sentiment interfere with business if it wanted to pay dividends, and most of them did. He said it was a matter of dollars and cents like any other business, and Ed had already cost 'em a lot of good hard cash for doctor's bills. Then he admitted that the accident had been a good thing for him, in a way, he being there on the spot and the first to make a report over to the superintendent at Tekoa.

"I bet you made a jim-dandy good report," says Ed, taking heart again after this sordid dollars-and-cents talk. "It was certainly a fine chance to write something exciting if a man had any imagination. You

probably won't have another chance like that in all your career."

"My report pleased the Old Man all right," says Ben. "He's kind of had his eye on me ever since. He said the way I worded that report showed I wasn't one to lose my head and get hysterical, the way he had known some green hands to do."

"I'll certainly have to have a look at that report," says Ed. "Probably you did get a little bit hysterical at that seeing there was lots of excuse for it."

Ben says no, he can't remember that he was hysterical any, because the high-class railroad man must always keep his head in emergencies. Ed says, anyway he knows it must of been a corking good report, and he'll sure have a look at it when he gets to stepping again.

All the same, it begun to look to Ed like his accident wasn't being made enough of. It come over him gradually. Of course he'd got to be an old story round the hospital and people was beginning to duck when he started talking. Then, after he got on crutches he'd hobble about the fatal spot, pointing out his route to parties that would stay by him, and getting 'em to walk over two hundred and thirty-five feet to where he was picked up lifeless. And pretty soon even this outside trade fell off. And right after that he begun to meet new trainmen and others that had never heard a word about the accident and looked at him like they thought he was a liar when he told the details. He was coming to be a grouchy nuisance round Wallace. Even the doctor said he'd be glad when Ed got entirely well again.

Ed couldn't understand it. He must of thought the company should stop all trains for five minutes every day at the hour of his mix-up, or at the very least that the president of the road and the board of directors

ought to come down in a special car and have their pictures taken with him; and a brass tablet should be put up on the ice house, showing where his lifeless carcass was recovered. And of course they would send him a solid gold engraved pass, good for life between all stations on all divisions. But these proper attentions was being strangely withheld. So far as Ed could see, the road had gone right on doing business as usual.

He couldn't understand it at all. It seemed like he must be dreaming. He wrote to Ben, who was still up the line, that this here fine report he had made must of got lost; anyway, it seemed like the company had never got round to reading it or they wouldn't have took things so placid. By now he was pinning all his hopes to this report of Ben's if any justice was going to be done him in this world. He'd tell parties who doubted his story that he guessed they'd believe him fast enough if they ever got an eye on Ben's report, which was made on the spot, and was so good a report, though not hysterical, that it had drawn compliments from the division superintendent.

It occurs to him one day that he ought to have a copy of this report if he is ever going to be set right before the world. He suspects crooked work by this time. He suspects mebbe the company is keeping the thing quiet on purpose, not wanting the public to know that such wonderful accidents could happen to its faithful employees. So he talks to Charlie Holzman, the conductor of Number 18, and wants to know would it be possible to sneak this report of Ben's out of the files over at Tekoa. Charlie says that wouldn't be possible, but he's going to lay over at Tekoa the very next night and he'll be glad to make a copy of the report.

Ed says he hates to keep Charlie setting up half the night writing, or mebbe all night, because Ben has told

him the report was a good one. Charlie says he'll get help if necessary. Ed says get all the help necessary and he'll pay the bill, and not to leave out even the longer descriptive parts, because if it's as well written as Ben says it is he may have it printed in a little volume for sending round to his friends.

The next day Ed is sunning himself on the station platform when Number 18 steams in. He's told a lot of people that Charlie is bringing this report and he's aiming to read it aloud, just to show 'em what a man can pass through and live to tell of it. Charlie swings down and hands him one folded sheet of yellow paper. Ed says, what's the matter—couldn't he get to copy the report? Charlie says the report is all there on that sheet, every word of it. One sheet! And Ed had been expecting at least forty pages of able narrative, even without hysteria. Even before he looks at it Ed says there is crooked work somewhere.

Then he read Ben's report. It didn't fill even the one sheet—not more than half of it. It merely says: "Brakeman Steptoe had trouble holding two cars of concentrates he was letting down from the Tiger-Poorman mine at Burke. Cars ran to Wallace and left track. Steptoe thrown some distance. Right leg and arm broken; left shoulder dislocated; head cut some. Not serious."

It was unbelievable; so Ed did the simple thing and didn't believe it. Not for one minute! He says to Charlie Holzman: "Charlie, I know you're honest; and, furthermore, you are a brother Moose. You've brought me what's on file in that office; so now I know there's a conspiracy to hush my accident up. I've thought so a long time—the way people acted round here. Now I know it. Don't say a word; but I'm going to take it up with Ben at once. Good old Ben!

Won't he be in a frenzy when he finds this paltry insult has been sneaked into the files in place of his report on me!" So into the station he goes and wires Ben up the line to come there at once on account of something serious.

Ben gets in that night. He thought Ed must be dying and had got a lay-off. He goes over to the hospital and is a mite disappointed to find Ed ain't even worse, but is almost well and using only one crutch.

Ed first makes sure no one can overhear, then tells Ben about this conspiracy, showing him the false report that has been smuggled into the files in place of the real one Ben had sent in. It takes Ben a couple of minutes to get the idea of what Ed is so worked up over. But he finally does get it. He then sweeps all ideas of a conspiracy out of Ed's mind forever. He says his talk is all nonsense; that this here is the very report he made, every word of it; and, as to that, if he had it to write over again he could shorten it by at least six words, but he must of been excited at the time. He says he has already told Ed that the Old Man complimented him on it because he hadn't lost his head and got hysterical, showing he had the makings of a good railroad man in him. And what had Ed expected, anyway? Didn't he know that your superiors want the simple facts in cases of this kind and no fancy work, wanting chiefly to know about damage to the rolling stock and how long before the main line will be open? Ed must be crazy, making him get a lay-off just for this! Had he looked for some verses of poetry about his accident, or a novel? Ben wasn't any novelist and wouldn't be one if you give him a chance. He was just a brakeman, with a bright future before him.

Ben was quite indignant himself by this time think-

ing of two days' pay lost, and Ed could hardly believe his own ears. He just set there, swelling up like a toad in a very feverish way. "But 'some distance,'" says Ed in low tones of awe. "You say I was thrown 'some distance,' like it was a casual remark. Is that any way to talk about a man hurled two hundred and thirty-five feet from start to finish?—which I can prove by the man that taped it. Why, any one would think them two cheap box cars was the real heroes of this accident. No one would dream that a precious human life was at stake. And 'Not serious!' And 'Head cut some!' Great suffering cats! Was that any way to talk about a fellowman—not to say a first cousin?"

Ben was pretty mad himself now and swore right out—at least the only oath he ever swears, which is "By doggie!" He says, by doggie, it ain't his fault that Ed was so brittle! And, by doggie, he wasn't going to let family affection interfere none with his career, because it wouldn't be right by the children he hopes some day to be the father of! Then he got his temper back and tried patiently to explain once more to Ed that what a railroad company wants in such cases is facts and figures, and not poetry—chiefly about the rolling stock. He says Ed can't expect a great corporation, with heavy freight and passenger traffic, to take any deep personal interest in the bone troubles of a mere brakeman.

It was about here, I guess, that Ed's feelings must of overcome him. He saw it was no use bandying words any more; so he started to do foul murder. He committed several acts of frightfulness on Ben with his crutch, seeming quite active for a cripple. Ben finally got out of range and went and had some stitches took in his own scalp. He swore, by doggie, he was through

with that maniac forever! But he wasn't through. Not by no means!

Ed was now well enough to stand shipping; so he come down to Red Gap and started to work. He couldn't get round with his machines yet; so he got a new Home Queen and parked himself in the doorway of a vacant store and made embroidered hat marks for the multitude at one dollar a throw. Yes, sir; he congested traffic there on Fourth Street for about two weeks, taking a strip of satin ribbon and embroidering people's initials on it, so they could sew it in their hats and know whose hat it was. Hardly a hat in town that didn't have one, with thrilled crowds looking on while he done it.

I begged him to take it easy and stay at my house till he was strong again; but he wouldn't. He said he had to do something just to keep from thinking. Of course the poor lollop had never been able to think under any circumstances; but it sounded good. And, of course, he told me his trouble. I don't believe he held back the least little thing from the beginning of the accident down to the time he lammed Ben with his crutch. He now blamed everything on Ben. He said neither the company nor any one else could take his accident seriously after that lying report Ben put in. No wonder there hadn't been any real excitement about it. He was right bitter.

"'Some distance' Ben says I was thrown. I should think it was some distance! I'll bet it's farther than any other man was ever thrown on their whole rotten system. And 'Not serious'! Great Jeeminetty! What would have to happen to a person before he'd call it serious? Oh, I'll make him take that back if ever I get to be the man I once was! The only trouble with Ben is, he hasn't anything here and he hasn't anything here"

—Ed put his hand first on his head and next on his heart, to show me where Ben hadn't got anything—"and that kind of trash may make fine railroad men, but they hadn't ought to be classed with human beings. Just wait till I get firmly knitted together again! You'll see! I'll certainly interfere with that man's career aplenty. 'Not serious!' He won't make any such report about himself when I get through fussing with him. He certainly does need handling—that Ben Steptoe."

And so on for half an hour at a time, while he might be stitching G. W. G. in purple letters on a strip of yellow satin ribbon. I used to stop on purpose to hear some more about what he was going to do to Ben when he got to be the man he once was.

Pretty soon he had identified all the hats in Red Gap; so he moved over to Colfax with his Home Queen, and then on to other towns. It was spring again before he seemed to be the man he once was. He wrote me from Tekoa that if I read in the papers about something sad happening to Ben I wasn't to be alarmed, because, though it would be serious enough, it would probably not prove fatal if he had skilled nursing. So I watched the papers, but couldn't find any crime of interest. And a few days later Ed come over to Red Gap again. He looked pretty good, except for an overripe spot round his left eye.

"Well, did you lick Ben?" I says.

"No; Ben licked me," he says.

I'd never heard such a simple and astounding speech from any man on earth before. I started to find out what his excuse was—whether he wasn't in good shape yet, or his foot slipped, or Ben took a coupling pin to him, or something. But he didn't have a single word of excuse. He ought to of been locked up in a glass case in a museum right there. He said he was in fine

shape and it had been a fair fight, and Ben had nearly knocked his head off.

I says what is he going to do now; and he says oh, he'll wait a while and give Cousin Ben another go.

I says: "Mebbe you can't lick Ben."

He says: "Possibly so; but I can keep on trying. I have to protect my honour, don't I?"

That's how it seemed to the poor fish by this time—his honour! And I knew he was going to keep on trying, like he had said. If he had made the usual excuses that men put up when they've had the worst of it I'd of known he'd been well licked, and once would be a-plenty. But, seeing that he was probably the only man who had been honest under such conditions since the world began, I had a feeling he would keep on. He was sure going to annoy Ben from time to time, even if he didn't panic him much. He was just as turbulent as ever.

Now he went off and joined a circus, being engaged to lecture in front of the side show about the world's smallest midget, and Lulu the snake empress, and the sheep-headed twins from Ecuador. And Ben could devote the whole summer to his career without worry. I saw him over at Colfax one day.

"Mark my words; that lad was never cut out for a railroad man," says Ben. "He lets his emotions excite his head too much. Oh, I give him a good talking-to, by doggie! I says to him: 'Why, you poor little hopeless, slant-headed, weak-minded idiot, you'—you know I always talk to Ed like he was my own brother—'what did you expect?' I says. 'I'm quite sorry for your injuries; but that was the first chance I'd ever had to make a report and I couldn't write one of these continuous stories about you. You ought to see that.' And what does he do but revile me for this common-sense talk! Tightminded—that's what he is; self-

headed, not to say mulish, by doggie! And then pestering round me to have a fist altercation till I had to give in to keep him quiet, though I'm not a fighting character. I settled him, all right. I don't know where he is now; but I hope he has three doctors at his bedside, all looking doubtful. That little cuss always did contrary me."

I told him Ed had gone with this circus side show.

"Side show!" he says. "That's just where he belongs. He ought to be setting right up with the other freaks, because he's a worse freak than the living skeleton or a lady with a full beard—that's what he is. And yet he's sane on every subject but that. Sometimes he'll talk along for ten minutes as rational as you or me; but let him hear the word accident and off he goes. But, by doggie, he won't bother me again after what I give him back of the Wallace freight shed."

"He solemnly promised he would," I says, "when I saw him last. He was still some turbulent."

And he did bother Ben again, late that fall. When the circus closed he travelled back a thousand miles in a check suit and a red necktie, just to get another good licking. Ben must of been quite aggravated by that time, for he wound up by throwing Ed into the crick in all his proud clothes.

Ed was just as honest about it as before. He says Ben licked him fair. But it hadn't changed his mind. He felt that Ben's report had knocked his just celebrity and he was still hostile.

"Mebbe you can't lick Ben," I says to him again.

"I can keep on doing my endeavours," he says. "I had to come off in a friend of mine's coat because my own was practically destroyed; but I'll be back again before Ben has clumb very high on that ladder of his career."

The adventurer was interned at my house for ten days, till his bruises lost their purple glow and he looked a little less like a bad case of erysipelas. Then he started out again, crazy as a loon! I didn't hear from him for nearly two years. Then I got a letter telling about his life of adventure down on the Border. It seems he'd got in with a good capable stockman down there and they was engaged in the cattle business. The business was to go over into Mexico, attracting as little notice as possible, cut out a bunch of cattle, and drive 'em across into the land of the free. Naturally what they sold for was clear profit.

Ed said he was out for adventure and this had aplenty. He said I wouldn't believe how exciting it could be at times. He wanted to know what Ben was promoted to by this time, and was he looking as hearty as ever? Some day he was coming back and force Ben to set him right before the world.

About a year later he writes that the cattle business is getting too tame. He's done it so much that all the excitement has gone. He says I wouldn't believe how tame it can be, with hardly any risk of getting shot. He says he wouldn't keep on running off these Mexican cattle if it wasn't for the money in it; and, furthermore, it sometimes seems to him when he's riding along in the beautiful still night, with only God's stars for companions, that there's something about it that ain't right.

But it's another year before he writes that he has disposed of his stock interests and is coming North to lick Ben proper. He does come North. He was correct to that extent. He outfitted at the Chicago Store in Tucson, getting the best all-wool ready-made suit in Arizona, with fine fruit and flower and vegetable effects, shading from mustard yellow to beet colour; and patent-leather ties, with plaid socks—and so on.

He stopped off at Red Gap on his way up to do this outrage. His face was baked a rich red brown; so I saw it wouldn't show up marks as legibly as when he was pale.

He said Ben wasn't a right bad fellow and he had no personal grudge against him, except he needed to have his head beat off on account of his inhumanity.

I told him Ben had worked up from yardmaster at Wallace to assistant division superintendent at Tekoa, where he would probably find him; and I wished him God-speed.

He said he rejoiced to know of Ben's promotion, because he had probably softened some, setting round an office. He promised to let me know the result at once.

He did. It was the same old result. The fight had gone a few more rounds, I gathered, but Ed still gave the decision against himself in the same conscientious way. He said Ben had licked him fair. It was uncanny the way he took these defeats. No other human being but would of made some little excuse. He came back in another suit and a bit blemished in the face, and said Ben seemed to be getting a fair amount of exercise in spite of his confining office duties; but—mark his words—that indoor work would get him in time. He'd never seen a man yet that could set at a desk all day and keep in shape to resent fighting talk, even from a lighter man by twenty pounds. He said he might have to wait till Ben was general manager, or something; but his day was coming, and it would be nothing for Ben to cheer about when it got here. He now once more drifted out over the high horizon, only one eye being much help to him in seeing the way.

Then Ben come down and had a wholehearted session with me. He said I ought to have a talk with Ed

and reason him out of his folly. I said Ed would listen to a number of things, but not to reason. He said he knew it; that the poor coot should be in some good institution right now, where the state could look after him. He said he couldn't answer for the consequences if Ed kept on in this mad way. He said here he was, climbing up in his profession, and yet with this scandal in his private life that might crop out any time and blast his career; and, by doggie, it was a shame! He said it was hanging over him like a doom and sometimes he even woke up in the night and wished he had made a different report about the accident—one with a little hysterics or description in it, like this maniac had seemed to crave.

"It ain't that I can't lick him," says Ben—"I've proved that three times; but having to do it every so often, which is beneath the dignity of a high railroad official. I might as well be a common rowdy and be done with it, by doggie! And no telling what will happen if he don't get his mind back. The little devil is an awful scrapper. I noticed it more than ever this last time. One of these times he might get me. He might get me good."

"You better let him, then," I says, "and have it over. That's the only thing which will ever stop him. You take a man that says he was licked fair, but still keeps at it, and he's deadly. Next time he comes along you lay down after making a decent resistance. Then he'll probably be your friend for life, especially if you tell him you been thinking about his accident and it now seems like the most horrible accident that ever happened to man."

It was the most encouragement I could give and he went off gloomy. Ben was certainly one conscientious objector.

Nothing come from Ed for over a year. Then he writes that he has give up the cattle business for good, because Mexico is in a state of downright anarchy and he has been shot through the shoulder. He put it well. He said he had been shot from ambush by a cowardly Mexican and I wouldn't believe how lawless that country was. So now he was going to take up mining in God's own country, where a man could get a square deal if he kept out of railroading. And was Ben keeping up his exercise?

He stayed under the surface for about three years. Neither Ben nor I heard a word from him. I told Ben it was many chances to one that he had gone under at the hands of someone that wanted to keep his cattle or his mine or something. Ben looked solemn and relieved at this suggestion. He said if the Grim Reaper had done its work, well and good! Life was full of danger for the best of us, with people dropping off every day or so; and why should Ed have hoped to be above the common lot?

But the very next week comes a letter from the deceased wanting to know whether Ben has been promoted some more and how he is looking by this time. Is he vigorous and hearty, or does office work seem to be sapping his vitality? It was the same old Ed. He goes on to say that the reason he writes is that the other night in Globe, Arizona, he licked a man in the Miners' Rest saloon that looked enough like Ben to be his twin; not only looked the image of him but had his style of infighting. And he had licked him right and made him quit. He said the gent finally fled, going through the little swinging doors with such force that they kept swinging for three minutes afterward. So now is the time for him to come up and have another go at Ben.

Of course he ain't superstitious, but it does seem

like Providence has taken this means of pointing out the time to him. But he is in reduced circumstances at this moment, owing to complications it would take too long to explain; so will I lend him about two hundred and fifty dollars to make the trip on? And he will have Ben off his mind forever and be able to settle down to some life work. Just as sane as ever—Ed was.

I sent the letter to Ben, not wishing him to rest in false security. But I wrote Ed firmly that I couldn't see my money's worth in his proposition. I told him Ben was keeping in splendid condition, having the glow of health in his cheeks and a grip like an osteopath, and I'd be darned if I was going to back a three-time loser in the same old fight. I said he wasn't the only sensitive person in the world. I was a little fussy myself about what people might think of my judgment. And I gave him some good advice which was to forget his nonsense and settle down to something permanent before he died of penury.

He wrote a kind, forgiving answer. He said he couldn't blame me for turning against him after his repeated failures to lick Ben, but his nature was one I should never understand. He said he would amass the money by slow grinding toil, and when he next come North and got through handling Ben I would be the very first to grasp him by the hand and confess that I had wronged him. It was as nutty a letter as Ed ever wrote; which is some tribute. I sent it on to Ben and I believe it was right after that he ordered one of these exercising machines put up in his bedroom, with a book showing how to become a Greek god by pulling the weights five minutes, morning and evening.

But this time come silence so long that I guess even Ben forgot he had a doom hanging above his head by a single hair. I know I did. Let's see. It must of

been a good five years before I hear from Ed again. It was another hard-luck letter. He had just worked a whole season for a contractor that blew up and left him with one span of mules in place of his summer's wages; which was a great disappointment, because he had been looking forward to an active reunion with Ben. How was Ben, anyway? And did he show the ravages of time?

And no one had wanted these mules, because they was inferior mules; but when he was on the point of shooting them to stop their feed bill along come two men that had a prospect over in the Bradshaw Mountains and offered him a one third interest in it for his span. So he had sawed the mules off onto these poor dubs and told 'em all right about the third interest in their claim, and forget it; but they insisted on his taking it. So he did, and was now working in the B.&.B. store at Prescott, selling saddles and jewellery and molasses and canned fruit and lumber, and such things. He didn't care much for the life, but it was neck-meat or nothing with him now.

No wonder these men that cheated him out of his mules had made him take a third interest in their claim. It was now taking all his salary to pay assessments and other expenses on it. But he was trying to trade this third interest off for something that wouldn't be a burden to him; then he should have a chance to put his money by and come up to give Ben what he was sooner or later bound to get if there was a just God in Heaven. He spoke as freshly about Ben as if his trouble had begun the day before. You wouldn't think twelve years had gone by. He was now saying Ben had put a stigma on him. It had got to be a stigma by this time, though he probably hadn't any idea what a stigma really is. He'd read it somewhere.

Then the waves closed over the injured man for about three years more. This time it looked as if he'd gone down for good, stigma and all. Ben thought the same. He said it was a great relief not to be looking forward any more to these brutal affrays that Ed insisted on perpetrating. And high time, too, because he was now in line for general manager, and how would it look for him to be mixed up in brawls?

And everything was serene till the papers broke out into headlines about a big strike made in the Bradshaw Mountains of Arizona by three partners, of whom one was named Steptoe. They seemed to have found all the valuable minerals in that claim of theirs except platinum. Ben tried first to believe it was someone else named Steptoe; but no such luck. We read that a half interest in the property had been sold to an Eastern syndicate for three million dollars and a company organized of which Edward J. Steptoe was president.

"It may be all for the best, anyway," Ben says to me. "Now that he's a big mining man he'll probably have other aims in life than being a thug."

You could see he was hoping to make a separate peace with the new millionaire, who would forget the grudge of his old days when he had to work for what he got, or at least run the risk of getting shot for it. But I wasn't so sure. I reminded Ben that Ed had never yet done anything you'd think a human being would do, so why expect him to begin now, when he had abundant leisure? I advised him to give deep thought to the matter of his defense, and if the battle went against him to withdraw to a position previously prepared, like the war reports say. Ben said a few warm things about Ed, by doggie, that no cousin ought to say of another cousin, and went off, hoping against hope.

And, sure enough, Ed came promptly to the front.

It seems he waited only long enough to get a new suit and an assorted lot of the snappiest diamond jewellery he could find. Then he wired me he was coming to right the wrongs of a lifetime. Reaching San Francisco, it occurred to him that he could put it all over Ben in another way that would cut him to the heart; so he there chartered the largest, goldest, and most expensive private car on the market, having boudoirs and shower baths and conservatories and ballrooms, and so on; something that would make Ben's dinky little private car look like a nester's shack or a place for a construction gang to bunk in. And in this rolling palace Ed invaded our peaceful country, getting lots of notice. The papers said this new mining millionaire was looking us over with an eye to investment in our rich lands. Little they knew he merely meant to pull off a brutal fist altercation with a prominent railroad official that was somewhat out of condition.

Ben was one worried man, especially after he heard of Ed's private car. It was one thing to lick an ex-brakeman, but entirely different to have an affray with a prominent capitalist that come after you regardless of expense. Furthermore, this was the time for the annual tour of inspection by the officers of the road, and they was now on the way to Ben's division, with him hoping to create a fine impression by showing his miracles of management. And here was Ed, meaning to start something scandalous at sight! No wonder Ben lost his nerve and tried to run out on his antagonist. He was trying to put it off at least till after his officials had come and gone.

So for six days he kept about thirty miles of standard-gauge track between his car and Ed's. Ed would get word that he was at such a station and have his car dropped there, only to find that Ben had gone on.

Ed would follow on the next train, or mebbe hire a special engine; and Ben would hide off on some blind spur track. They covered the whole division about three times without clashing, thanks to Ben's superior information bureau; it being no trick at all to keep track of this wheeled apartment house of Ed's.

Ed couldn't understand it at first. Here he'd come up to lick Ben, and Ben was acting queer about it. Ed would send messages every day wanting to know when and where he could have a nice quiet chat with Ben that would not be interfered with by bystanders; and Ben would wire back that his time wasn't his own and company business was keeping him on the jump, but as soon as this rush was over he would arrange an interview; and kind regards, and so on. Or he might say he would be at some station all the following day; which would be a clumsy falsehood, because he was at that moment pulling out, as Ed would find when he got there. The operating department must of thought them a couple of very busy men, wanting so much to meet, yet never seeming able to get together.

Ed got peeved at last by the way Ben was putting him off. It wasn't square and it wasn't businesslike. He had large mining interests in charge and here was Ben acting like he had all summer to devote just to this one little matter. He called Ben's attention to this by telegraph, but Ben continued to be somewhere else from where he said he was going to be.

After a week of this pussy-wants-a-corner stuff Ed got wise that the thing had come to be a mere vulgar chase, and that his private car was hampering him by being so easy to keep track of. So he disguised himself by taking off his diamond ornaments and leaving his private car at Colfax, and started out to stalk Ben as a common private citizen in a day coach. He got results

that way, Ben supposing he was still with his car. After a couple of scouting trips up and down the line he gets reliable word that Ben, with his bunch of high officials, is over at Wallace.

So much the better, thinks Ed. It will be fine to have this next disturbance right on the spot where a great wrong was done him fifteen years before. So he starts for Wallace, wiring for his car to follow him there. He'd found this car poor for the bloodhound stuff, but he wanted Ben to have a good look at it and eat his heart out with envy, either before or after what was going to happen to him.

He gets to Wallace on the noon train and finds that Ben with his officials has gone up the cañon, past Burke, on the president's private car, to return in about an hour. After Ed's inquiries the agent kindly wires up to Ben that his cousin from Arizona is waiting for him. Ed spends the time walking round Ben's shabby little private car and sneering at it. He has his plans all made, now that he has run his man to earth. He won't pull anything rough before the officials, but about twenty miles out on the line is a siding with a shipping corral beside it and nothing else in sight but vistas. They'll get an engine to run the two cars out there that night and leave 'em, and everything can be done decently and in order. No hurry and no worry and no scandal.

Ed is just playing the coming fight over in his mind for the fifth time, correcting some of his blows here and there, when he hears a whistle up the cañon and in comes the special. The officials pile off and Ben comes rushing up to Ed with a glad smile and effusive greetings and hearty slaps on the back; and how is everything, old man?—and so on—with a highly worried look lurking just back of it all; and says what rare

good luck to find Ed here, because he's the very man they been talking about all the way down from Burke.

Ed says if they come down as fast as he did one time they didn't get a chance to say much about him; but Ben is introducing him to the president of the road and the general manager and the chief engineer and three or four directors, and they all shake hands with him till it seems like quite a reception. The president says is this really the gentleman who has made that last big strike in Arizona! And if it is he knows something still more interesting about him, because he has just listened to a most remarkable tale of his early days as a brakeman on this very line. Their division superintendent has been telling of his terrific drop down the cañon and his incredible flight through the air of three hundred and thirty-five feet.

"How far did he say I was hurled?" says Ed, and the president again says three hundred and thirty-five feet, which was a hundred more than Ed had ever claimed; so he looks over at Ben pretty sharp.

Ben is still talking hurriedly about the historic accident, saying that in all his years of railroad experience he never heard of anything approaching it, and if they will step up the track a piece he will show them just where the cars left the rails. Ben must of done a lot of quick thinking that day. He had the bunch over to see the exact spot, and they all stood and looked over to the ice house and said it was incredible; and a director from Boston said it was perfectly preposterous; really now! And Ben kept on reciting rapidly about the details. He said Ed had come down the seven miles in less than three minutes, which was lopping a minute and a half off the official time; and that when picked up he hadn't a whole bone left in his body,

which was also a lie; and that his cousin never could of survived if he hadn't probably had the most marvellous constitution a man was ever endowed with. He then made the bunch go over to the ice house to see the other exact spot, and they looked back to where he started from, and again said it was incredible and preposterous.

I don't know. Mebbe they wouldn't of thought it preposterous that a mere brakeman was hurled that far, but Ed was a capitalist now. Anyway, the president had him into his car for lunch with the party, and they might possibly of got to talking about other things of less importance, but Ben wouldn't have anything else. He made 'em insist that Ed should tell his version of the whole thing; how he felt when the cars started, and how the scenery was blurred, and how his whole past life flashed before him, and the last thing he remembered before he hit the sawdust. And Ben set there looking so proud of Ed, like a mother having her little tot recite something. And when Ed had finally lit, Ben made him tell about his slow recovery. And after Ed got himself well again Ben would go back to the start and ask for more details, such as whether he hadn't wanted to jump off on the way down, or whether he had been conscious while going through the air for nearly four hundred feet.

Ed got little food; but much he cared! He'd come into his own at last. And suddenly he was surprised by finding a warm glow in his heart for Ben, especially after Ben had said for about the third time: "I was certainly a green hand in those days; so green that I didn't begin to realize what a whale of an occurrence this was." Ed was getting a new light on Ben.

After lunch Ed's own car got in from Colfax and he had the party over there for cigars and more talk about

himself, which was skillfully led by Ben. Then the president invited Ed to hitch his car on and come along with them for a little trip, and talk over mining and investments, and so on, and what the outlook was in the Southwest. So Ed went with 'em and continued to hear talk of his accident. Ben would bring it up and harp back to it, and bring it forward and sandwich it in whenever the conversation had an open moment. It was either the wild thoughts Ed must of had sliding down the cañon, or the preposterous constitution he had been endowed with, or the greenness of himself for not recognizing it as the prize accident of the ages. And I don't wonder Ben went on that way for the next two days. He knew what a tenacious idiot Ed was, and that he had come miles out of his way to try something he had often tried before. The most he could hope for was to stave off the collision till his officials got away.

And it looked, the second night, like he wasn't going to be able to do even this much. He'd been detecting cold looks from Ed all day, in spite of his putting on another record about the accident every ten minutes or so. They was laid out at some little station, and just before dinner Ed give Ben the office that he wanted a word private with him. Ben thinks to himself it's coming now in spite of all his efforts to smooth it over. But he leaves the car with Ed and they walk a piece up the track, Ben hoping they can make the lee of a freight car before Ed starts his crime of violence. He makes up his mind quick. If Ed jumps him there in the open he will certainly do his best to win the contest. But if he waits till they get this freight car between them and the public, then he will let Ed win the fight and get the scandal out of his life forever.

Ben walks quite briskly, but Ed begins to slow up

when they ain't more than a hundred yards from the president's car. Finally Ed stops short.

"The little fool is going to pull the fight here in the open!" thinks Ben; so he gets ready to do his best.

Then Ed says:

"Say, Ben, what's the matter with you, anyway? Are you losing your mind? It ain't so much on my account; I could make allowance for you. But here's these officials of yours, and you want to make a good impression on 'em; instead of which you are making yourself the grandest bore that ever needed strangling for continuous talk on one subject."

Ben didn't get him yet. He says come on up the other side of them freight cars, where they can be more private for their consultation.

Ed says no; this is far enough to tell him for his own good not to be such a bore; an' Ben says how is he a bore?

"A bore?" says Ed. "Why, for forty-eight hours you ain't been able to talk about anything but that stale old accident of mine, and you got me so sick of it I could jump on you every time you begin. You got everybody in the party sick of it. Don't you see how they all try to get away from you? For the Lord's sake, can't you think up something else to talk about now and then—at least for five minutes, just to give your silly chatter a little different flavour? I never been so sick of anything in my life as I am of this everlasting prattle of yours about something that was over and forgotten fifteen long years ago! What's got into you to keep dragging that accident up out of the dead past that way? Anyway, you better cut it out. I have to listen because you're my cousin; but these officials don't. Your next pay check is liable to be your last on this road if you don't think up some other kind

of gossip. Darned if it don't seem like you had been getting weak-minded in your old age!"

Ben had got his bearings by this time. He apologized warmly to Ed; he said it was true this magnificent catastrophe had lately taken possession of his mind, but now that he finds Ed is so sensitive about it he'll try to keep it out of his talk, and he hopes Ed won't cherish hard feelings against him.

Ed says no, he won't cherish anything if Ben will only quit his loathsome gushing about the accident; and Ben says he will quit. And so they shook hands on it.

That's the way the feud ended. The champion grudge hoarder of the universe had been dosed to a finish with his own medicine. It showed Ben has a weakness for diplomacy; kind of an iron hand in a velvet glove, or something.

Ed is still a nut, though. There was a piece in a Sunday paper not long ago about this new mining millionaire. He spoke some noble words to the youth of our land. He said young American manhood could still make its fortune in this glorious country of opportunity by strict attention to industry and good habits and honest dealing and native pluck—him that had had these mules forced on him in the first place, and then his interest in this claim forced on him for the mules, and then hadn't been able to get shut of the claim. Ain't it lovely how men will dig up a license to give themselves all credit for hog luck they couldn't help!

Ma Pettengill busied herself with a final cigarette and remarked that she never knew when to stop talking. Some parties did, but not her; and she having to be up and on the way to Horsefly Mountain by six-thirty in the A. M.! Her last apology was for a longing she

had not been able to conquer: She couldn't help a debased wish to know how that last fight would of come out.

"Of course it ain't nice to want men to act like the brutes," said the lady. "Still, I can't help wondering; not that I'm inquisitive, but just out of curiosity."

V

ONE ARROWHEAD DAY

IT BEGAN with the wonted incitement to murder. A wooden staff projects some five feet above the topmost roof peak of the Arrowhead ranch house, and to this staff is affixed a bell of brazen malignity. At five-thirty each morning the cord controlling this engine of discord is jerked madly and forever by Lew Wee, our Chinese chef. It is believed by those compelled to obey the horrid summons that this is Lew Wee's one moment of gladness in a spoiled life. The sound of the noon bell, the caressing call of the night bell—these he must know to be welcome. The morning clangour he must know to be a tragedy of foulest import. It is undeniably rung with a keener relish. There will be some effort at rhythm with the other bells, but that morning bell jangles in a broken frenzy of clangs, ruthlessly prolonged, devilish to the last insulting stroke. Surely one without malice could manage this waking bell more tactfully.

A reckless Chinaman, then, takes his life in his hands each morning at five-thirty. Something like a dozen men are alarmed from deep sleep to half-awakened incredulity, in which they believe the bell to be a dream bell and try to dream on of something noiseless. Ten seconds later these startled men have become demons, with their nice warm feet on the icy floor of the bunkhouse, and with prayers of simple fervour that the so-and-so Chink may be struck dead while his hand is still on

the rope. This prayer is never answered; so something like a dozen men dress hurriedly and reach the Arrowhead kitchen hurriedly, meaning to perform instantly there a gracious deed which Providence has thus far unaccountably left undone.

That the Arrowhead annals are, as yet, unspiced with a crime of violence is due, I consider, to Lew Wee's superb control of his facial muscles. His expression when he maniacally yanks the bell cord is believed by his victims to be one of hellish glee; so they eagerly seek each morning for one little remaining trace of this. The tiniest hint would suffice. But they encounter only a rather sad-faced, middle-aged Chinaman, with immovable eyes and a strained devotion to delicate tasks, of whom it is impossible to believe that ever a ray of joy gladdened his life.

There is a secondary reason why the spirit of Lew Wee has not long since been disembodied by able hands: His static Gorgon face stays the first murderous impulse; then his genial kitchen aroma overpowers their higher natures and the deed of high justice is weakly postponed. This genial kitchen aroma is warm, and composed cunningly from steaming coffee and frying ham or beef, together with eggs and hot cakes almost as large as the enamelled iron plates from which they are eaten. It is no contemptible combination on a frosty morning. No wonder strong men forget the simple act of manslaughter they come there to achieve and sit sullenly down to be pandered to by him who was erst their torturer.

On a morning in late May, when I had been invited to fare abroad with my hostess, Mrs. Lysander John Pettengill—who would breakfast in her own apartment—I joined this assemblage of thwarted murderers as they doggedly ate. It is a grim business, that ranch break-

fast. Two paling lamps struggle with the dawn, now edging in, and the half light is held low in tone by smoke from the cake griddle, so that no man may see another too plainly. But no man wishes to see another. He stares dully into his own plate and eats with stern aversion. We might be so many strangers in a strange place, aloof, suspicious, bitter, not to say truculent.

No quip or jest will lighten the gloom. Necessary requests for the sugar or the milk or the stewed apples are phrased with a curtly formal civility. We shall be other men at noon or at night, vastly other, sunnier men, with abundance of quip and jest and playful sally with the acid personal tang. But from warm beds of repose! We avoid each other's eyes, and one's subdued "please pass that sirup pitcher!" is but tolerated like some boorish profanation of a church service.

The simple truth, of course, is that this is the one hour of the day when we are face to face with the evil visage of life unmasked; our little rosy illusions of yestereve are stale and crumpled. Not until we are well out in the sun, with the second cigarette going good, shall we again become credulous about life and safe to address. It is no meal to linger over. We grimly rise from the wrecked table and clatter out.

Only one of us—that matchless optimist, Sandy Sawtelle—sounds a flat note in the symphony of disillusion. His humanness rebounds more quickly than ours, who will not fawn upon life for twenty minutes yet. Sandy comes back to the table from the hook whence he had lifted his hat. He holds aloft a solitary hot cake and addresses Lew Wee in his best Anglo-Chinese, and with humorous intent:

"I think take-um hot cake, nail over big knot hole in bunk-house—last damn long time better than sheet iron!"

Swiftly departing pessimists accord no praise or attention to this ill-timed sketch; least of all Lew Wee, who it is meant to insult. His face retains the sad impassivity of a granite cliff as yet beyond the dawn.

Now I am out by the saddle rack under the poplars, where two horses are tied. Ma Pettengill's long-barrelled roan is saddled. My own fleabitten gray, Dandy Jim, is clad only in the rope by which he was led up from the caviata. I approach him with the respectful attention his reputed character merits and try to ascertain his mood of the moment. He is a middle-aged horse, apparently of sterling character, and in my presence has always conducted himself as a horse should. But the shadow of scandal has been flung athwart him. I have been assured that he has a hideous genius for cinch binding. Listening at first without proper alarm, it has been disclosed to me that a cinch binder ain't any joke, by a darned sight! A cinch binder will stand up straight and lean over backward on me. If I'm there when he hits the ground I'll wish I wasn't—if I am able to wish anything at all and don't simply have to be shipped off to wherever my family wants it to take place.

I am further enlightened: Dandy Jim ain't so likely to start acting if not saddled when too cold. If I saddle him then he will be expecting to have more fun out of it than I have any right to. But if the sun is well up, why, sometimes a baby could handle him. So for three weeks I have saddled Dandy Jim with the utmost circumspection and with the sun well up. Now the sun is not well up. Shall I still survive? I pause to wish that the range of high hills on the east may be instantly levelled. The land will then be worth something and the sun will be farther up. But nothing of a topographical nature ensues. The hills remain to obscure the

sun. And the brute has to be saddled. The mood of that grim breakfast, voiceless, tense, high with portent, is still upon me.

I approach and speak harshly to the potential cinch binder, telling him to get over there! He does not; so I let it pass. After all, he is only a horse. Why should I terrorize him? I bridle him with a manner far from harsh. He doesn't like the taste of the bit—not seasoned right, or something. But at last he takes it without biting my fingers off; which shows that the horse has no mind to speak of.

I look him calmly in the eye for a moment; then pull his head about, so that I can look him calmly in the other eye for a moment. This is to show the animal that he has met his master and had better not try any of that cinch-binding stuff if he knows when he's well off. Still, I treat him fairly. I smooth his back of little vegetable bits that cling there, shake out the saddle blanket and tenderly adjust it. Whistling carelessly I swing up the saddle. Dandy Jim flinches pitifully when it rests upon him and reaches swiftly round to bite my arm off. I think this is quite perfunctory on his part. He must have learned long since that he will never really bite any one's arm off. His neck is not enough like a swan's.

I adjust saddle and blanket carefully from both sides, pulling the blanket well up under the horn of the saddle and making sure that it sets comfortably. One should be considerate of the feelings of a dumb beast placed at one's mercy. Then I reach for the cinch, pass it twice through the rings, and delicately draw it up the merest trifle. Dandy Jim shudders and moans pathetically. He wishes to convey the impression that his ribs have been sprung. This, of course, is nonsense. I measureably increase the pressure. Dandy Jim again

registers consternation, coughs feebly, and rolls his eyes round appealingly, as if wondering whether the world is to sit, without heart, and watch a poor defenseless horse being slain. He is about to expire.

I now lead him gently about by the bridle. It occurs to me that a horse with this curious mania for binding cinches or cinching binders—or, in other words, a cinch binder—will be as willing to indulge in his favourite sport with the saddle unoccupied as otherwise. He may like it even better with no one up there; and I know I will. Nothing happens, except that Dandy Jim stumbles stiffly and pretends to be lame. The sun is not yet well up; still, it is a lot better. Perhaps danger for the day is over. I again lead the dangerous beast——

"What you humouring that old skate for?"

Ma Pettengill, arrayed in olive-drab shirt and breeches, leather puttees, and the wide-brimmed hat of her calling with the four careful dents in the top, observed me with friendly curiosity as she ties a corduroy coat to the back of her saddle.

Hereupon I explained my tactful handling of the reputed cinch binder. It evoked the first cheerful sound I had heard that day:

Ma Pettengill laughed heartily.

"That old hair trunk never had the jazz to be any cinch binder. Who told you he was?"

I named names—all I could remember. Almost everyone on the ranch had passed me the friendly warning, and never had I saddled the brute without a thrill.

"Sure! Them chuckleheads always got to tell everybody something. It's a wonder they ain't sent you in to the Chink to borrow his meat auger, or out to the blacksmith shop for a left-handed monkey wrench, or something. Come on!"

So that was it! Just another bit of stale ranch humour —alleged humour—as if it could be at all funny to have me saddle this wreck with the tenderest solicitude morning after morning!

"Just one moment!" I said briskly.

I think Dandy Jim realized that everything of a tender nature between us was over. Some curious and quite charming respect I had been wont to show him was now gone out of my manner. He began to do deep breathing exercises before I touched the cinch. I pulled with the strength of a fearless man. Dandy Jim forthwith inflated his chest like a gentleman having his photograph taken in a bathing suit. I waited, apparently foiled. I stepped back, spoke to Ma Pettengill of the day's promise, and seemed carelessly to forget what I was there for. Slowly Dandy Jim deflated himself; and then, on the fair and just instant, I pulled. I pulled hard and long. The game was won. Dandy Jim had now the waist of that matron wearing the Sveltina corset, over in the part of the magazine where the stories die away. I fearlessly bestrode him and the day was on.

I opened something less than a hundred gates, so that we could take our way through the lower fields. Ma Pettengill said she must see this here Tilton and this here Snell, and have that two hundred yards of fence built like they had agreed to, as man to man; and no more of this here nonsense of putting it off from day to day.

She was going to talk straight to them because, come Thursday, she had to turn a herd of beef cattle into that field.

Then I opened a few dozen more gates and we were down on the flats. Here the lady spied a coyote, furtively skirting some willows on our left. So, for a few

merry miles, we played the game of coyote. It is a simple game to learn, but requires a trained eye. When one player sees a coyote the other becomes indebted to him in the sum of one dollar.

This sport dispelled the early morning gloom that had beset me. I won a dollar almost immediately. It may have been the same coyote, as my opponent painfully suggested; but it showed at a different breach in the willows, and I was firm.

Then the game went fiercely against me. Ma Pettengill detected coyotes at the far edges of fields—so far that I would have ignored them for jack rabbits had I observed them at all. I claimed an occasional close one; but these were few. The outlook was again not cheering. It was an excellent morning for distant coyotes, and presently I owed Mrs. Lysander John Pettengill seven dollars, she having won two double-headers in succession. This ride was costing me too much a mile. Being so utterly outclassed I was resolving to demand a handicap, but was saved from this ignominy by our imminent arrival at the abode of this here Tilton, who presently sauntered out of a feeding corral and chewed a straw at us idly.

We soon took all that out of him. The air went something like this:

Mrs. L. J. P.—brightly: Morning, Chester! Say, look here! About that gap in the fence across Stony Creek field—I got to turn a beef herd in there Thursday.

Tilton—crouching luxuriously on one knee still chewing the straw: Well, now, about that little job—I tell you, Mis' Pett'ngill; I been kind o' holdin' off account o' Snell bein' rushed with his final plowin'. He claims——

Mrs. L. J. P.—still brightly: Oh, that's all right!

Snell will be over there, with his men, to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. He said you'd have to be there, too.

TILTON—alarmed, he rises, takes straw from his mouth, examines the chewed end with dismay and casts it from him; removes his hat, looks at this dubiously, burnishes it with a sleeve, and sighs: To-morrow morning! You don't mean to-morrow——

MRS. L. J. P.—carefully yet rapidly: To-morrow morning at seven o'clock. You don't want to throw Snell down on this; and he's going to be there. How many men can you take?

TILTON—dazed: Now—now lemme see!

MRS. L. J. P.—quickly: You can take Chris and Shorty and Jake and yourself. Any one else?

TILTON—swept over the falls: Why, no'm; I don't guess there's any other I could spare, account of——

MRS. L. J. P.—almost sweetly: All right, then. To-morrow; seven sharp.

TILTON—from the whirlpool, helplessly: Yes'm! Yes'm!

MRS. L. J. P.: Morning!

We ride on. Tilton fades back toward the corral; he has forgotten to replace his hat.

I now decided to make a little conversation rather than have the stupid and ruinous game of coyote for a pastime.

"I thought you hadn't seen Snell yet."

"I haven't; not since he promised his half of the job two weeks ago."

"But you just told Tilton——"

"Well, Snell is going to be there, ain't he?"

"How do you know?"

"I'm going to tell him now."

And the woman did even so. If you wish the scene with Snell go back and read the scene with Tilton, changing the names. Nothing else need you change. Snell was hitching two mules to a wood wagon; but he heard the same speeches and made approximately the same replies. And the deed was done.

"There now!" boomed Mrs. Talleyrand as we rode beyond earshot of the dazed and lingering Snell. "Them two men been trying for two weeks to agree on a day to do this trifling job. They wasn't able; so I agreed on a day myself. Anything wrong with it?"

"You said you were going to talk straight to them."

"Ain't I just talked straight to Snell? Tilton will be there, won't he?"

"How about the way you talked to Tilton before you saw Snell?"

"Well, my lands! How you talk! You got to have a foundation to build on, haven't you?"

I saw it as a feat beyond my prowess to convict this woman in her own eyes of a dubious and considering veracity. So I merely wondered, in tones that would easily reach her, how the gentlemen might relish her diplomacy when they discovered it on the morrow. I preceded the word diplomacy with a slight and very affected cough.

The lady replied that they would never discover her diplomacy, not coughing in the least before the word. She said each of them would be so mad at the other for setting a day that they would talk little. They would simply build fence. She added that a woman in this business had to be looking for the worst of it all the time. She was bound to get the elbow if she didn't use her common sense.

I ignored her casuistry, for she was now rolling a cigarette with an air of insufferable probity. I gave her up

and played a new game of smashing horseflies as they settled on my mount. Dandy Jim plays the game ably. When a big fly settles on his nose he holds his head round so I can reach it. He does not flinch at the terrific smash of my hat across his face. If a fly alights on his neck or shoulder, and I do not remark it, he turns his head slightly toward me and winks, so I can stalk and pot it. He is very crafty here. If the fly is on his right side he turns and winks his left eye at me so the insect will not observe him. And yet there are people who say horses don't reason.

I now opened fifty more gates and we left the cool green of the fields for a dusty side road that skirts the base of the mesa. We jogged along in silence, which I presently heard stir with the faint, sweet strain of a violin; an air that rose and wailed and fell again, on a violin played with a certain back-country expertness. The road bent to show us its source. We were abreast of the forlorn little shack of a dry-farmer, weathered and patched, set a dozen yards from the road and surrounded by hard-packed earth. Before the open door basked children and pigs and a few spiritless chickens.

All the children ran to the door when we halted and called to someone within. The fiddle played on with no faltering, but a woman came out—a gaunt and tattered woman who was yet curiously cheerful. The children lurked in her wake as she came to us and peered from beyond her while we did our business.

Our business was that the redskin, Laura, official laundress of the Arrowhead, had lately attended an evening affair in the valley at which the hitherto smart tipple of Jamaica ginger had been supplanted by a novel and potent beverage, Nature's own remedy for chills, dyspepsia, deafness, rheumatism, despair, carbuncles, jaundice, and ennui. Laura had partaken

freely and yet again of this delectable brew, and now suffered not only from a sprained wrist but from detention, having suffered arrest on complaint of the tribal sister who had been nearest to her when she sprained her wrist. Therefore, if Mrs. Dave Pickens wanted to come over to-morrow and wash for us, all right; she could bring her oldest girl to help.

Mrs. Dave thereupon turned her head languidly toward the ignoble dwelling and called: "Dave!" Then again, for the fiddle stayed not: "Dave! Oh, Dave!"

The fiddle ceased to moan—complainingly it seemed to me—and Dave framed his graceful figure in the doorway. He was one appealing droop, from his moustache to his moccasin-clad feet. He wore an air of elegant leisure, but was otherwise not fussily arrayed.

"Dave, Mis' Pett'ngill says there's now a day's washin' to do over to her place to-morrow. What think?"

Dave deliberated, then pondered, then thought, then spoke:

"Well, I d'no', Addie; I d'no' as I got any objections if you ain't. I d'no' but it's all the same to me."

Hereupon we meanly put something in Dave's unsuspecting way, too.

"You must want a day's work yourself," called out Ma Pettengill. "You go up to Snell's about six in the morning and he'll need you to help do some fencing on that gap in Stony Creek field. If he don't need you Tilton will. One of 'em is bound to be short a man."

"Fencin'?" said Dave with noticeable disrelish.

"You reckon we better both leave the place at once?" suggested Mrs. Dave.

"That's so," said Dave brightly. "Mebbe I——"

"Nonsense!" boomed Ma Pettengill, dispelling his

brightness. "Addie can drop you at Snell's when she comes over to Arrowhead. Now that's settled!"

And we rode off as unvoiced expostulations were gathering. I began to wonder whether it must, throughout a beautiful day, be the stern mission of this woman to put tribulation upon her neighbours. She was becoming a fell destroyer. The sun was well up. I thirsted. Also, breakfast seemed to have been a thing in the remote past.

We now rode three torrid miles up a narrow green slit in the hills for a scant ten minutes of talk with a most uninteresting person, whose sole claim to notice seemed to be that he had gone and fenced the wrong water hole over back of Horsefly Mountain, where we have a summer range. The talk was quick and pointed and buttressed with a blue-print map, and the too-hasty fencer was left helpless after a pitiful essay at quibbling. We rode off saying that he could do just as he liked about sending someone over right away to take that fence down, because we had already took it down the minute we set eyes on it. We was just letting him know so he needn't waste any more wire and posts and time in committing felonious depredations that would get him nothing but high trouble if he was so minded. Another scalp to our belt!

I now briefly recalled to the woman that we had stopped at no peaceful home that morning save to wreck its peace. I said I was getting into the spirit of the ride myself. I suggested that at the next ranch we passed we should stop and set fire to the haystacks, just to crown the day's brutalities with something really splendid. I also said I was starving to death in a land of plenty.

Ma Pettengill gazed aloft at the sun and said it was half-past twelve. I looked at my watch and said the

sun was over ten minutes slow, which was probably due to the heavy continuous gunfire on the Western Front. This neat bit went for just nothing. As we rode on I fondly recalled that last cold hot cake which Sandy Sawtelle had sacrificed to his gift for debased whimsy. I also recalled other items of that gloomy repast, wondering how I could so weakly have quit when I did.

We rode now under a sun that retained its old fervour if not its velocity. We traversed an endless lane between fields, in one of which grazed a herd of the Arrowhead cattle. These I was made to contemplate for many valuable moments. I had to be told that I was regarding the swallow-fork herd, pure-breds that for one reason or another—the chief being careless help—had not been registered. The omission was denoted by the swallow fork in the left ear.

The owner looked upon them with fond calculation. She was fondly calculating that they would have been worth about fifty per cent. more to her with ears unmutilated. She grew resentful that their true worth should not be acclaimed by the world. In the sight of heaven they were pure-breds; so why should they suffer through the oversight of a herd boss that hadn't anywhere near such distinguished ancestry? And so on, as the lady says.

We left the lane at last and were on the county road, but headed away from the Arrowhead and food. No doubt there remained other homes for us to wreck. We mounted a rise and the road fell from us in a long, gentle slope. And then a mile beyond, where the slope ended, I beheld a most inviting tiny pleasance in this overwhelming welter of ranch land, with its more or less grim business of cattle.

It was a little homestead fit to adorn an art calendar

to be entitled Peace and Plenty—a veritable small farm from some softer little country far to the east. It looked strangely lost amid these bleaker holdings. There was a white little house and it sported nothing less than green blinds. There was a red barn, with toy outbuildings. There was a vegetable garden, an orchard of blossoming fruit trees, and, in front of the glistening little house, a gay garden of flowers. Even now I could detect the yellow of daffodils and the martial—at least it used to be martial—scarlet of tulips. The little place seemed to drowse here in the noontide, dreaming of its lost home and other little farms that once companioned it.

To my pleased surprise this unbelievable little farm proved to be our next stopping place. At its gate Ma Pettengill dismounted, eased the cinch of her saddle and tied her horse to the hitching rack. I did likewise by the one-time cinch binder.

"Now," I wondered, "what devastating bomb shall we hurl into this flower-spiced Arcady? What woe will she put upon its unsuspecting dwellers, even as she has ruined four other homes this day? This should be something really choice." But I said no word and followed where the avenger stalked.

We unlatched the white gate and went up a gravelled walk between the rows of daffodils and tulips and hyacinths. We did not ascend the spotless front porch to assault its innocent white door, but turned aside on a narrow-gauge branch of the gravelled pathway and came to a side porch, shaded by maples. And here, in strict conformity to the soundest behests of tradition, sat two entirely genuine Arcadians in wooden rocking-chairs. The male was a smiling old thing with winter-apple cheeks and white hair, and the female was a smiling old thing with winter-apple cheeks and white hair; both

had bright eyes of doll blue, and both wore, among other neat things, loose and lovely carpet slippers and white stockings.

And, of course, the male was named Uncle Henry and the other one was named Aunt Mollie, for I was now presented to them. They shyly greeted me as one returned to them after many years in which they had given me up. And again I wondered what particular iniquity we had come here to do.

Then Ma Pettengill eased my worry. She said in a few simple but affecting words, that we had stopped in for a bite to eat. No self-torturing stylist could have put the thing better. And results were sudden. Uncle Henry, the male one, went to take our horses round to the barn, and the other one said they had et an hour ago; but give her ten minutes and she'd have a couple of them young pullets skinned and on the fire.

Ma Pettengill said, with very questionable taste, I thought: "Oh, no; nothing like that!"—because we didn't want to make the least bit of trouble. The woman is dense at times. What else had we come there for? But Aunt Mollie said, then, how about some prime young pork tenderline? And Ma Pettengill said she guessed that would do, and I said I guessed that would do. And there we were! The ladies went to the kitchen, where they made quick and grateful noises.

Pretty soon Uncle Henry came round a lovely corner and said try a tumbler of this here grape wine, which he poured from a pressed-glass pitcher; so I tried it and gave him a town cigarette, which he tucked between his beautiful white moustache and his beautiful white whiskers. And I hoped he didn't use gasoline to get them so clean, because if he did something might happen when he lighted the cigarette; but nothing did, so prob-

ably he didn't. I tried the grape wine again; and dear old Uncle Henry said he was turning out quite a bit of it since the Gov'ment had shet down on regular dramshops, quite considerable of parties happening along from time to time to barter with him, getting it for dances or colds, or something.

A yellow cat, with blue eyes like Uncle Henry's, came and slept on his lap. A large fussy hen with a litter of chickens—or however a hen designates her assemblage of little ones—clucked her way to our feet. I could see three hives of bees, a grape arbour, and a row of milk pans drying in the sun, each leaning on its neighbour along a white bench. Uncle Henry said drink it up while it was cold. All Nature seemed to smile. The hen found a large and charming bug, and chuckled humorously while her cunning little ones tore it limb from limb. It was idyllic.

Then Aunt Mollie pushed open the screen door and said come in and set up; so I came in and set up quickly, having fried pork tenderloin and fried potatoes, and hot biscuit and pork gravy, and cucumber pickles, and cocoanut cake and pear preserves, peach preserves, apricot preserves, loganberry jelly, crab-apple jelly, and another kind of preserves I was unable to identify, though trying again and again.

Ma Pettengill ate somewhat, but talked also, keeping Uncle Henry and Aunt Mollie shiny with smiles. They both have polished white teeth of the most amazing regularity. I ate almost exclusively, affecting to be preoccupied about something. The time was urgent. I formed an entangling alliance with the pork tenderloin, which endured to a point where but one small fragment was left on the platter. I coolly left it there, so that Aunt Mollie might believe she had cooked more than enough.

I have never ceased to regret that hollow bit of chivalry. Was it honest, genuine, open? No! Why will men at critical junctures stoop to such trickery? Aunt Mollie said I might think that tenderline was fresh-killed; but not so—she has fried it last December and put it down in its own juice in a four-gallon crock, and now look how fresh it come out! She seemed as proud as if she had invented something. She had a right to be. It was a charming notion and I could have eaten the rest of the crock—but, no matter. Half a dozen biscuits copiously gummed up with preserves of one kind or another would do as well—almost.

So Aunt Mollie showed me objects of interest in the room, including her new carpet sweeper, a stuffed road runner, a ship built in a bottle, and the coloured crayon portraits of herself and Uncle Henry, wearing blue clothes and gold jewellery and white collars and ecru neckties. Also, the marriage certificate. This was no mere official certificate. It was the kind that costs three dollars flat, over and above what you give to the party that does it for you, being genuine steel-engraved, with a beautiful bridal couple under a floral bell, the groom in severe evening dress, and liberally spotted with cupids and pigeons. It is worth the money and an ornament to any wall, especially in the gilt frame.

Aunt Mollie seemed as proud of this document as she had been with the tenderloin. I scanned it word by word for her pleasure. I noticed especially the date. Aunt Mollie said that her and Henry were now in the fortieth year on this place, and it had changed in looks a whole lot since they came here. I again looked at the date of the certificate.

Ma Pettengill said, well, we must be getting on, and they must both come over to the Arrowhead for a day right soon. And Uncle Henry said here was a quart

bottle of his peach brandy, going on eight year old, and would I take it along back with me and try it? Parties had told him it was good; but he didn't know—mebbe so, mebbe not. He'd like to know what I thought. It seemed little enough to do to bring a bit of gladness into this old gentleman's life, and I was not the man to wound him by refusal. It was as if Michelangelo had said "Come on round to the Sistine Chapel this afternoon and look over a little thing I've dashed off." If he had brought two bottles instead of one my answer would have been the same.

So we were out on our refreshed horses and heading home; and I said, without loss of time, that Aunt Mollie might have a good heart and a cunning way with pork interiors, and it was none of my business, anyway; but, nevertheless, she had mentioned forty long years with this amateur saloon keeper, whereas her marriage certificate was dated but one year previous, in figures all too shamefully legible. So what about it? I said I mind observing the underworld from time to time; but I like to be warned in advance, even when its denizens were such a charming, bright-eyed winter-apple-cheeked old couple as the two we were now leaving.

The sun was on our backs, a light breeze fanned us, the horses knew which way they were going, and work for the day was over; so Ma Pettengill spoke, in part, as follows:

"Oh, well, of course everyone knows about that. Simple enough! Aunt Mollie and her first husband trekked in here forty years ago. He was a consumptive and the first winter put him out. They had a hard time; no neighbours to speak of, harsh weather, hard work, poor shelter, and a dying man. Henry Mortimer happened by and stayed to help—nursed the invalid, kept the few head of stock together, nailed up holes in

the shack, rustled grub and acted like a friend in need. At the last he nailed a coffin together; did the rest of that job; then stayed on to nurse Aunt Mollie, who was all in herself. After he got her to stepping again he put in a crop for her. Then he stayed to build a barn and do some fencing. Then he harvested the crop. And getting no wages! They was both living off the land. Pretty soon they got fond of each other and decided to marry. It's one of Aunt Mollie's jokes that she owed him two years' wages and had to marry him.

"Marriage was easier said than done. No preacher, or even a justice of the peace, was within ninety miles, which meant a four days' trip over the roads of that day, and four days back, providing high water or some other calamity didn't make it a month; and no one to leave on the place, which meant there wouldn't be a head of stock left when they got back, what with Indians and rustlers. Uncle Henry will tell you how it seemed too bad that just one of 'em wouldn't make the trip down and have the ceremony done, leaving the other to protect the place.

"Then along comes a horse trader, who stops over to rest his stock, and learns their trouble. He tells 'em to quit their worry; that he's a notary public and can perform a marriage as good as any Baptist preacher they ever saw. I never been able to make out whether he was crazy or just a witty, practical joker. Anyway, he married the pair with something like suitable words, wouldn't take a cent for it, and gave 'em a paper saying he had performed the deed. It had a seal on it showing he was a genuine notary public, though from back in Iowa somewhere. That made no difference to the new bride and groom. A notary public was a notary public to them, highly important and official.

"They had enough other things to worry about, any-

way. They had to buckle down to the hard life that waits for any young couple without capital in a new country. They had years of hard sledding; but they must of had a good time somehow, because they never have any but pleasant things to tell of it. Whatever that notary public was, he seemed to of pulled off a marriage that took as well or better than a great many that may be more legal. So that's all there is to it—only, here about a year ago they was persuaded to have it done proper at last by a real preacher who makes Kulanche two Sundays a month. That's why the late date's on that certificate. The old lady is right kittenish about that; shows it to everyone, in spite of the fact that it makes her out of been leading an obliquitous life, or something, for about thirty-eight years.

"But then, she's a sentimental old mush-head, anyhow. Guess what she told me out in the kitchen! She's been reading what the Germans did to women and children in Belgium, and she says: 'Of course I hate Germans; and yet it don't seem as if I could ever hate 'em enough to want to kill a lot of German babies!' Wasn't that the confession of a weakling? I guess that's all you'd want to know about that woman. My sakes! Will you look at that mess of clouds? I bet it's falling weather over in Surprise Valley. A good moisting wouldn't hurt us any either."

That seemed to be about all. Yet I was loath to leave the topic. I still had a warm glow in my heart for the aged couple, and I could hear Uncle Henry's bottle of adolescent peach brandy laughing to itself from where it was lashed to the back of my saddle. I struck in the only weak spot in the wall.

"You say they were persuaded into this marriage. Well, who persuaded them? Isn't there something interesting about that?"

It had, indeed, been a shrewd stroke. Ma Pettengill's eyes lighted.

"Say, didn't I ever tell you about Mrs. Julia Wood Atkins, the well-known lady reformer?"

"You did not. We have eight miles yet."

"Oh, very well!"

So for eight miles of a road that led between green fields on our right and a rolling expanse of sagebrush on our left, I heard something like this:

"Well, this prominent club lady had been out on the Coast for some time heading movements and telling people how to do things, and she had got run down. She's a friend of Mrs. W. B. Hemingway, the well-known social leader and club president of Yonkers, who is an old friend of mine; and Mrs. W. B. writes that dear Julia is giving her life to the cause—I forget what cause it was right then—and how would it be for me to have her up here on the ranch for a vacation, where she could recover her spirits and be once more fitted to enter the arena. I say I'm only too glad to oblige, and the lady comes along.

"She seemed right human at first—kind of haggard and overtrained, but with plenty of fights left in her; a lady from forty-eight to fifty-four, with a fine hearty manner that must go well on a platform, and a kind of accusing face. That's the only word I can think of for it. She'd be pretty busy a good part of the day with pamphlets and papers that she or someone else had wrote, but I finally managed to get her out on a gentle old horse—that one you're riding—so she could liven up some; and we got along quite well together.

"The only thing that kind of went against me was, she's one of them that thinks a kind word and a pleasant smile will get 'em anywhere, and she worked both on me a little too much like it was something professional.

"Still, I put it by and listened to her tell about the awful state the world is in, and how a few earnest women could set it right in a week if it wasn't for the police.

"Prison reform, for instance. That was the first topic on which she delivered addresses to me. I couldn't make much out of it, except that we don't rely enough on our convicts' rugged honour. It was only a side line with her; still, she didn't slight it. She could talk at length about the innate sterling goodness of the misunderstood burglar. I got tired of it. I told her one day that, if you come right down to it, I'd bet the men inside penitentiaries didn't average up one bit higher morally than the men outside. She said, with her pleasantest smile, that I didn't understand; so I never tried to after that.

"The lady had a prowling mind. Mebbe that ain't the right word, but it come to me soon after she got here. I think it was the day she begun about our drinking water. She wanted to know what the analysis showed it to contain. She was scared out of her pleasant smile for a minute when she found I'd never had the water analyzed. I thought, first, the poor thing had been reading these beer advertisements; you know—the kind they print asking if you are certain about the purity of your drinking water, telling of the fatal germs that will probably be swimming there, and intimating that probably the only dead-safe bet when you are thirsty is a pint of their pure, wholesome beer, which never yet gave typhoid fever to any one. But, no; Julia just thought all water ought to be analyzed on general principles, and wouldn't I have a sample of ours sent off at once? She'd filled a bottle with some and suggested it with her pleasantest platform smile.

"'Yes,' I says; 'and suppose the report comes back

that this water is fatal to man and beast? And it's the only water round here. What then? I'd be in a hell of a fix—wouldn't I?'

"I don't deny I used to fall back on words now and then when her smile got to me. And we went right on using water that might or might not make spicy reading in a chemist's report; I only been here thirty years and it's too soon to tell. Anyway, it was then I see she was gifted with a prowling mind, which is all I can think of to call it. It went with her accusing face. She didn't think anything in this world was as near right as it could be made by some good woman.

"Of course she had other things besides the water to worry about. She was a writer, too. She would write about how friction in the home life may be avoided by one of the parties giving in to the other and letting the wife say how the money shall be spent, and pieces about what the young girl should do next, and what the young wife should do if necessary, and so on. For some reason she was paid money for these pieces.

"However, she was taking longer rides and getting her pep back, which was what she had come here for. And having failed to reform anything on the Arrowhead, she looked abroad for more plastic corruption as you might say. She rode in one night and said she was amazed that this here community didn't do something about Dave Pickens. That's the place we stopped this morning. She said his children were neglected and starving, his wife worked to the bone, and Dave doing nothing but play on a cheap fiddle! How did they get their bread from day to day?

"I told her no one in the wide world had ever been able to answer this puzzle. There was Dave and his wife and five children, all healthy, and eating somehow, and Dave never doing a stroke of work he could side-

step. I told her it was such a familiar puzzle we'd quit being puzzled by it.

"She said someone ought to smash his fiddle and make him work. She said she would do something about it. I applauded. I said we needed new blood up here and she seemed to of fetched it.

"She come back the next day with a flush of triumph on her severely simple face. And guess the first thing she asked me to do! She asked me to take chances in a raffle for Dave's fiddle. Yes, sir; with her kind words and pleasant smile she had got Dave to consent to raffle off his fiddle, and she was going to sell twenty-four chances at fifty cents a chance, which would bring twelve dollars cash to the squalid home. I had to respect the woman at that moment.

"'There they are, penniless,' says she, 'and in want for the barest necessities; and this man fiddling his time away! I had a struggle persuading him to give up his wretched toy; but I've handled harder cases. You should of seen the light in the mother's wan face when he consented! The twelve dollars won't be much, though it will do something for her and those starving children; and then he will no longer have the instrument to tempt him.'

"I handed over a dollar for two chances right quick, and Julia went out to the bunk-house and wormed two dollars out of the boys there. And next day she was out selling off the other chances. She didn't dislike the work. It give her a chance to enter our homes and see if they needed reforming, and if the children was subjected to refining influences, and so on. The first day she scared parties into taking fifteen tickets, and the second day she got rid of the rest; and the next Sunday she held the drawing over at Dave's house. The fiddle was won by a nester from over in Surprise Valley,

who had always believed he could play one if he only had a fair chance.

"So this good deed was now completed, there being no music, and twelve dollars in the Pickens home that night. And Mrs. Julia now felt that she was ready for the next big feat of uplift, which was a lot more important because it involved the very sanctity of the marriage tie. Yes, sir; she'd come back from her prowling one night and told me in a hushed voice, behind a closed door, about a couple that had been for years living in a state of open immorality.

"I didn't get her, at first, not thinking of Uncle Henry and Aunt Mollie. But she meant just them two. I give her a good hearty laugh, at first; but it pained her so much I let her talk. It seems she'd gone there to sell raffle tickets, and they'd taken four, and cooked food for her, and give her some cherry cordial, which she took on account of being far from a strong woman; and then Aunt Mollie had told all her past life, with this horrid scandal about the notary public sticking innocently out of it.

"Mrs. Julia hadn't been able to see anything but the scandal, she being an expert in that line. So she had started in to persuade Aunt Mollie that it was her sacred duty to be married decently to her companion in crime for forty years. And Aunt Mollie had been right taken with the idea; in fact, she had entered into it with a social enthusiasm that didn't seem to Mrs. Julia to have quite enough womanly shame for her dark past in it. Still, anything to get the guilty couple lawful wedded; and before she left it was all fixed. Uncle Henry was to make an honest woman of Aunt Mollie as soon as she could get her trousseau ready.

"Me? I didn't know whether to laugh or get mad. I said the original marriage had satisfied the peace and

dignity of the state of Washington; and it had done more—it had even satisfied the neighbours. So why not let it rest? But, no, indeedy! It had never been a marriage in the sight of God and couldn't be one now. Facts was facts! And she talked some more about Aunt Mollie not taking her false position in the proper way.

"It had been Mrs. Julia's idea to have the preacher come up and commit this ceremony quite furtively, with mebbe a couple of legal witnesses, keeping everything quiet, so as not to have a public scandal. But nothing like that for the guilty woman! She was going to have a trousseau and a wedding, with guests and gayety. She wasn't taking it the right way at all. It seemed like she wanted all the scandal there was going.

"'Really, I can't understand the creature,' says Mrs. Julia. 'She even speaks of a wedding breakfast! Can you imagine her wishing to flaunt such a thing?'

"It was then I decided to laugh instead of telling this lady a few things she couldn't of put in an article. I said Aunt Mollie's taking it this way showed how depraved people could get after forty years of it; and we must try to humour the old trollop, the main thing being to get her and her debased old Don Juan into a legal married state, even if they did insist on going in with a brass band. Julia said she was glad I took it this way.

"She came back to my room again that night, after her hair was down. The only really human thing this lady ever did, so far as I could discover, was to put some of this magic remedy on her hair that restores the natural colour if the natural colour happened to be what this remedy restores it to. Any way, she now wanted to know if I thought it was right for Aunt Mollie to continue to reside there in that house between now and the time when they would be lawful man and wife. I said no; I didn't think it was right. I thought it was a

monstrous infamy and an affront to public morals; but mebbe we better resolve to ignore it and plow a straight furrow, without stopping to pull weeds. She sadly said she supposed I was right.

"So Uncle Henry hitched up his fat white horse to the buggy, and him and Aunt Mollie drove round the country for three days, inviting folks to their wedding. Aunt Mollie had the time of her life. It seemed as if there wasn't no way whatever to get a sense of shame into that brazen old hussy. And when this job was done she got busy with her trousseau, which consisted of a bridge gown in blue organdie, and a pair of high white shoes. She didn't know what a bridge gown was for, but she liked the looks of one in a pattern book and sent down to Red Gap for Miss Gunslaugh to bring up the stuff and make it. And she'd always had this secret yearning for a pair of high white shoes; so they come up, too.

"Furthermore, Aunt Mollie had read the city paper for years and knew about wedding breakfasts; so she was bound to have one of those. It looked like a good time was going to be had by all present except the lady who started it. Mrs. Julia was more malignantly scandalized by these festal preparations than she had been by the original crime; but she had to go through with it now.

"The date had been set and we was within three days of it when Aunt Mollie postponed it three days more because Dave Pickens couldn't be there until this later day. Mrs. Julia made a violent protest, because she had made her plans to leave for larger fields of crime; but Aunt Mollie was stubborn. She said Dave Pickens was one of the oldest neighbours and she wouldn't have a wedding he couldn't attend; and besides, marriage was a serious step and she wasn't going to be hurried into it.

"So Mrs. Julia went to a lot of trouble about her ticket and reservations, and stayed over. She was game enough not to run out before Uncle Henry had made Aunt Mollie a lady. I was a good deal puzzled about this postponement. Dave Pickens was nothing to postpone anything for. There never was any date that he couldn't be anywhere—at least, unless he had gone to work after losing his fiddle, which was highly ridiculous.

"The date held this time. We get word the wedding is to be held in the evening and that everyone must stay there overnight. This was surprising, but simple after Aunt Mollie explained it. The guests, of course, had to stay over for the wedding breakfast. Aunt Mollie had figured it all out. A breakfast is something you eat in the morning, about six-thirty or seven; so a wedding breakfast must be held the morning after the wedding. You couldn't fool Aunt Mollie on social niceties.

"Anyway, there we all was at the wedding; Uncle Henry in his black suit and his shiny new teeth, and Aunt Mollie in her bridge gown and white shoes, and this young minister that wore a puzzled look from start to finish. I guess he never did know what kind of a game he was helping out in. But he got through with the ceremony. There proved to be not a soul present knowing any reason why this pair shouldn't be joined together in holy wedlock, though Mrs. Julia looked more severe than usual at this part of the ceremony. Uncle Henry and Aunt Mollie was firm in their responses and promised to cling to each other till death did them part. They really sounded as if they meant it.

"Mrs. Julia looked highly noble and sweet when all was over, like she had rescued an erring sister from the depths. You could see she felt that the world would

indeed be a better place if she could only give a little more time to it.

"We stood round and talked some after the ceremony; but not for long. Aunt Mollie wound the clock and set the mouse-trap, and hustled us all off to bed so we could be up bright and early for the wedding breakfast. You'd think she'd been handling these affairs in metropolitan society for years. The women slept on beds and sofas, and different places, and the men slept out in the barn and in a tent Uncle Henry had put up or took their blanket rolls and bunked under a tree.

"Then ho! for the merry wedding breakfast at six-thirty A. M.! The wedding breakfast consisted of ham and eggs and champagne. Yes, sir; don't think Aunt Mollie had overlooked the fashionable drink. Hadn't she been reading all her life about champagne being served at wedding breakfasts? So there it was in a new wash boiler, buried in cracked ice. And while the women was serving the ham and eggs and hot biscuits at the long table built out in the side yard, Uncle Henry exploded several bottles of this wine and passed it to one and all, and a toast was drunk to the legal bride and groom; after which eating was indulged in heartily.

"It was a merry feast, even without the lobster salad, which Aunt Mollie apologized for not having. She said she knew lobster salad went with a wedding breakfast, the same as champagne; but the canned lobster she had ordered hadn't come, so we'd have to make out with the home-cured ham and some pork sausage that now come along. Nobody seemed downhearted about the missing lobster salad. Uncle Henry passed up and down the table filling cups and glasses, and Aunt Mollie, in her wedding finery, kept the food coming with some buckwheat cakes at the finish.

"It was a very satisfactory wedding breakfast, if

any one should ever make inquiries of you. By the time Uncle Henry had the ends out of half the champagne bottles I guess everyone there was glad he had decided to drag Aunt Mollie back from the primrose path.

"It all passed off beautifully, except for one tragedy. Oh, yes; there's always something to mar these affairs. But this hellish incident didn't come till the very last. After the guests had pretty well et themselves to a standstill, Dave Pickens got up and come back with a fiddle, and stood at the end of the grape arbour and played a piece.

"'Someone must have supplied that wretch with another fiddle!' says Mrs. Julia, who was kind of cross, anyway, having been bedded down on a short sofa and not liking champagne for breakfast—and, therefore, not liking to see others drink it.

"'Oh, he's probably borrowed one for your celebration,' I says.

"Dave played a couple more lively pieces; and pretty soon, when we got up from the table, he come over to Mrs. Julia and me.

"'It's a peach of a fiddle,' says Dave. 'It says in the catalogue it's a genuine Cremonika—looks like a Cremona and plays just as good. I bet it's the best fiddle in the world to be had for twelve dollars!'

"'What's that?' says Mrs. Julia, erecting herself like an alarmed rattlesnake.

"'Sure! It's a genuine twelve-dollar one,' says Dave proudly. 'My old one, that you so kindly raffled off, cost only five. I always wanted a better one, but I never had the money to spare till you come along. It's awful hard to save up money round here.'

"'Do you mean to tell me——' says Mrs. Julia. She was so mad she couldn't get any farther. Dave thought she was merely enthusiastic about his new fiddle.

"'Sure! Only twelve dollars for this beauty,' he says, fondling the instrument. 'We got down the mail-order catalogue the minute you left that money with us, and had a postal order on the way to Chicago that very night. I must say, lady, you brought a great pleasure into our life.'

"'What about your poor wife?' snaps Mrs. Julia.

"His poor wife comes up just then and looks affectionately at Dave and the new fiddle.

"'He spent that money for another fiddle!' says Mrs. Julia to her in low tones of horror.

"'Sure! What did you think he was going to do with it?' says Mrs. Dave. 'I must say we had two mighty dull weeks while Dave was waiting for this new one. He just mopes round the house when he hain't got anything to play on. But this is a lot better than the old fiddle; it was worth waiting for. Did you thank the lady, Dave?'

"Mrs. Julia was now plumb speechless and kind of weak. And on top of these blows up comes Aunt Mollie the new-wed, and beams fondly on her.

"'There!' says she. 'Ain't that a fine new fiddle that Dave bought with his twelve dollars? And wasn't it worth postponing my wedding for, so we could have some music?'

"'What's that?' says Mrs. Julia again. 'Why did you postpone it?'

"'Because the fiddle didn't get here till last night,' says Aunt Mollie, 'and I wasn't going to have a wedding without music. It wouldn't seem right. And don't you think, yourself, it's a lot better fiddle than Dave's old one?'

"So this poor Mrs. Julia woman was now stricken for fair, thinking of all the trouble she'd been to about her tickets, and all to see this new fiddle.

"She went weakly into the house and lay down, with a headache, till I was ready to leave the gay throng. And the next day she left us to our fate. Still, she'd done us good. Dave has a new fiddle and Aunt Mollie has her high white shoes. So now you know all about it."

We neared the Arrowhead gate. Presently its bell would peal a sweet message to those who laboured. Ma Pettengill turned in her saddle to scan the western horizon.

"A red sun has water in his eye," said she. "Well, a good soak won't hurt us."

And a moment later:

"Curious thing about reformers: They don't seem to get a lot of pleasure out of their labours unless the ones they reform resist and suffer, and show a proper sense of their degradation. I bet a lot of reformers would quit to-morrow if they knew their work wasn't going to bother people any."

VI

THE PORCH WREN

SO IT befell, in a shining and memorable interlude that there was talk of the oldest living boy scout, who was said to have rats in his wainscoting; of the oldest living débutante, who was also a porch wren; and of the body snatcher. Little of the talk was mine; a query now and again. It was Ma Pettengill's talk, and I put it here for what it may be worth, hoping I may close-knit and harmonize its themes, so diverse as that of the wardrobe trunk, the age of the earth, what every woman thinks she knows, and the Upper Silurian trilobites.

It might be well to start with the concrete, and baby's picture seems to be an acceptable springboard from which to dive into the recital. It came in the evening's mail and was extended to me by Mrs. Lysander John Pettengill, with poorly suppressed emotion. The thing excited no emotion in me that I could not easily suppress. It was the most banal of all snapshots—a young woman bending Madonna-wise above something carefully swathed, flanked by a youngish man who revealed a self-conscious smirk through his carefully pointed beard. The light did harshly by the bent faces of the couple and the disclosed fragment of the swathed thing was a weakish white blob.

I need not say that there must be millions of these pathetic revealments burdening our mails day by day. I myself must have looked coldly upon over a thousand.

"Well, what of it?" I demanded shortly.

"I bet you can't guess what's in that bundle!" said my hostess in a large playful manner.

I said what I could see of it looked like a half portion of plain boiled cauliflower, but that in all probability the object was an infant, a human infant—or, to use a common expression, a baby. Whereupon the lady drew herself up and remarked in the clipped accent of a parrot:

"No, sir; it's a carboniferous trilobite of the Upper Silurian."

This, indeed, piqued me. It made a difference. I said was it possible? Mrs. Pettengill said it was worse than possible; it was inevitable. She seemed about to rest there; so I accused her of ill-natured jesting and took up the previous day's issue of the Red Gap *Recorder*, meaning to appear bored. It worked.

"Well, if Professor Oswald Pennypacker don't call his infant that, you can bet your new trout rod he calls it something just as good. Mebbe I better read what the proud mother says."

"It would be the kind thing before you spread evil reports," I murmured in a tone of gentle rebuke.

So the woman polished her nose glasses and read a double sheet of long up-and-down calligraphy—that is, she read until she exploded in triumphant retort:

"Ha! There now! Don't I know a thing or two? Listen: 'Oswald is so enraptured with the mite; you would never guess what he calls it—"My little flower with bones and a voice!"' Now! Don't tell me I didn't have Oswald's number. I knew he wouldn't be satisfied to call it a baby; he'd be bound to name it something animal, vegetable, or mineral. Ain't it the truth? 'Little flower with bones and a voice!' What do you know about that? That's a scientist trying to be poetic.

"And here—get this: She says that one hour after the thing was born the happy father was caught by the doctor and nurse seeing if it could hold its own weight up on a broomstick, like a monkey. She says he was acutely distressed when these authorities deprived him of the custody of his child. Wouldn't that fade you? Trying to see if a baby one hour old could chin itself! Quite all you would wish to know about Oswald."

I hastily said no; it was not nearly all I wanted to know about Oswald. I wanted to know much more. Almost any one would. The lady once more studied the hairy face with its bone-rimmed glasses.

"Shucks!" said she. "He don't look near as proud in this as he does in that one he sent me himself—here, where is that thing?"

From the far end of the big table she brought under the lamp a basket of Indian weave and excavated from its trove of playing cards, tobacco sacks, cigarette papers, letters, and odd photographs another snapshot of Oswald. It was a far different scene. Here Oswald stood erect beside the mounted skeleton of some prehistoric giant reptile that dwarfed yet left him somehow in kingly triumph.

"There now!" observed the lady. "Don't he look a heap more egregious by that mess of bones than he does by his own flesh and blood? Talk about pride!"

And I saw that it was so. Here Oswald looked the whole world in the face, proud indeed! One hand rested upon the beast's kneecap in a proprietary caress. Oswald looked too insufferably complacent. It was the look to be forgiven a man only when he wears it in the presence of his first-born. If snapshots tell anything at all, these told that Oswald was the father of a mammoth sauropod and had merely dug up the baby in a fossil bed somewhere.

"That's where the man's heart really lies," said his stern critic, "even if he does drivel about his little flower with bones and a voice! Probably by now he's wishing the voice had been left out of his little flower." Impressively she planted a rigid forefinger on the print of the mounted skeleton.

"That there," she glibly rattled off, "is the organic remains of a three-toed woolly bronsolumphicus of the carboniferous limestone, or Upper Silurian trilobite period. I believe I have the name correct. It was dug up out of a dry lake in Wyoming that years ago got to be mere loblolly, so that this unfortunate critter bogged down in it. The poor thing passed on about six million or four hundred million years ago—somewhere along there. Oswald and his new father-in-law dug it from its quiet resting place in the old cemetery. Such is their thrilling work in life.

"This father-in-law is just an old body snatcher that snoops round robbing the graves of antiquity and setting up his loot in their museum at the university. No good telling that old ghoul to let the dead rest. He simply won't hear of it. He wants remains. He wants to have 'em out in the light of day and stick labels on their long-peaceful skulls. He don't act subdued or proper about it either, or kind of buttery sad, like a first-class undertaker. He's gleeful. Let him find the skeleton of something as big as a freight car, that perished far in the dead past, and he's as tickled as a kid shooting at little sister with his new air gun.

"Bones in his weakness—and periods of geology. He likes period bones the way some folks like period furniture; and rocks and geography and Lower Triassics, and so forth. He knows how old the earth is within a few hundred million years; how the scantling and joists for it was put together, and all the different kinds

of teeth that wild animals have. He's a scientist. Oswald is a scientist. I was a scientist myself two summers ago when they was up here.

"By the time they left I could talk a lot of attractive words. I could speak whole sentences so good that I could hardly understand myself. Of course after they left I didn't keep up my science. I let myself get rusty in it. I probably don't know so much more about it now than you would. Oh, perhaps a little more. It would all come back to me if I took it up again."

So I said that I had nothing to do for an hour or so, and if she would not try to be scientific, but talk in her own homely words, I might consent to listen; in this event she might tell the whole thing, omitting nothing, however trifling it might seem to her, because she was no proper judge of values. I said it was true I might be overtaken by sleep, since my day had been a hard one, reaching clear to the trout pool under the big falls and involving the transportation back to seventeen rainbow trout weighing well over seventeen pounds, more or less, though feeling much like more. And what about Oswald and the primeval ooze, and so forth. And would it be important if true? The lady said—well, yes, and no; but, however——

He's Professor Marwich up at the university—this confirmed old coroner I'm telling you about. Has a train of capital letters streaming along after he's all through with his name. I don't know what they mean—doctor of dental surgery, I guess, or zoology or fractions or geography, or whatever has to do with rocks and animals and vertebræs. He ain't a bad old scout out of business hours. He pirooted round here one autumn about a dozen years ago and always threatened to come back and hold some more of these here inquests on the long departed; but I heard nothing until two

summers ago. He wrote that he wanted to come up to do field work. That's the innocent name he calls his foul trade by. And he wanted to bring his assistant, Professor Pennypacker; and could I put them up?

I said if they would wait till haying was over I could and would. He answered they would wait till my hay was garnered—that's the pretty word he used—and could he also bring his mouthless chit with him? I didn't quite make him. He writes a hand that would never get by in a business college. I thought it might be something tame he carried in a cage, and would stay quiet all day while he was out pursuing his repulsive practices. It didn't sound troublesome.

I never made a worse guess. It was his daughter he talked about that way. She was all right enough, though astounding when you had expected something highly zoological and mouthless instead of motherless. She was a tall roan girl with the fashionable streamline body, devoted to the ukulele and ladies' wearing apparel. But not so young as that sounds. Her general manner of conduct was infantile enough, but she had tired eyes and a million little lines coming round 'em, and if you got her in a strong light you saw she was old enough to have a serious aim in life.

She did use massage cream and beauty lotions with a deep seriousness you wouldn't suspect her of when she sat out in the hammock in the moonlight and scratched this ukulele and acted the part of a mere porch wren. That was really the girl's trade; all she'd ever learned. Mebbe she had misspent her early youth, or mebbe she wasn't meant for anything else—just a butterfly with some of the gold powder brushed off and the wings a little mite crumpled.

Gee! How times have changed since I took my own hair out of a braid! In them fond old days when a girl

didn't seem attractive enough for marriage she took up a career—school-teaching probably—and was looked at sidewise by her family. It's different now. In this advanced day a girl seems to start for the career first and take up marriage only when all other avenues is closed. She's the one that is now regarded by her brainy sisters as a failure. I consider it an evil state for the world to be in—but no matter; I can't do anything about it from up here, with haytime coming on.

Anyway, this Lydia girl had not been constructed for any career requiring the serious use of the head; and yet so far she had failed in the other one. She was on the way to being an outcast if she didn't pull something desperate pretty soon. She was looking down on thirty, and I bet her manner hadn't changed a bit since she was looking up to twenty.

Of course she'd learned things about her game. Living round a college she must of tried her wiles on at least ten graduating classes of young men. Naturally she'd learned technique and feminine knavery. She was still flirty enough. She had a little short upper lip that she could lift with great pathos. And the party hadn't more than landed here when I saw that at last she did have a serious aim in life.

It was this here assistant to her father, who was named Professor Oswald Pennypacker; and he was a difficult aim in life, because he didn't need a wife any more than the little dicky birds need wrist watches. You seen his picture there. About thirty-five he was and had devoted all his years to finding out the names of wild animals, which is said to be one of our best sciences. He hadn't got round to women yet. A good snappy skeleton of one might of entertained him if he could of dug it up himself and called it a sedimentary limestone; but he had never trifled with one that

was still in commission and ornamented with flesh and clothes.

And fussy! I wish you could of seen that man's room after he had carefully unpacked! A place for everything, and he had everything, too—everything in the world. And if someone switched his soap over to where his tooth paste belonged it upset his whole day. The Chink never dared to go into his room after the first morning. Oswald even made his own bed. Easy to call him an old maid, but I never saw any woman suffer as much agony in her neatness.

His shoes had to be in a row, and his clothes and hats and caps had to be in a row, and there was only one hook in the room his pyjamas could lawfully hang on, and his talcum powder had to stand exactly between the mosquito dope and the bay rum, which had to be flanked precisely by his manicure tools and succeeded by something he put on his hair, which was going the way of all flesh. If some marauder had entered his room in the night and moved his compass over to where his fountain pen belonged he would of woke up instantly and screamed.

And then his new wardrobe trunk! This was a great and holy joy that had come into his bleak life; all new and shiny and complicated, with a beautiful brass lock, one side for clothes on correct hangers and the other side full of drawers and compartments and secret recesses, where he could hide things from himself. It was like a furnished flat, that trunk. And this was his first adventure out in the great cruel world with it. He cherished it as a man had ought to cherish his bride.

He had me in to gaze upon it that first afternoon. You'd of thought he was trying to sell it to me, the way he showed it off. It stood on end, having a bulge like a watermelon in the top, so no vandal could stand it

up wrong; and it was wide open to show the two insides. He opened up every room in it, so I could marvel at 'em. He fawned on that trunk. And at the last he showed me a little brass hook he had screwed into the side where the clothes hangers was. It was a very important hook. He hung the keys of the trunk on it; two keys, strung on a cord, and the cord neatly on the hook. This, he told me, was so the keys would never get lost.

"I always have a dread I may lose those keys," says he. "That would be a catastrophe indeed, would it not? So I plan to keep them on that hook; then I shall always know where they are."

The crafty wretch! He could wake up in the night and put his hand on those keys in the dark. Probably he often done so. I spoke a few simple words of praise for his sagacity. And after this interesting lecture on his trunk and its keys, and a good look at the accurate layout of his one million belongings, I had his number. He was the oldest living boy scout.

And this poor girl with the designful eyes on him was the oldest living débutante. I learned afterward that the great aim of science is classification. I had these two classified in no time, like I'd been pottering away at science all my life. Why, say, this Oswald person even carried a patent cigar lighter that worked! You must of seen hundreds of them nickel things that men pay money for. They work fine in the store where you buy 'em. But did you ever see one work after the man got it outside, where he needed it? The owner of one always takes it out, looking strained and nervous, and presses the spring; and nothing happens except that he swears and borrows a match. But Oswald's worked every time. It was uncanny! Only a boy scout could of done it.

So they got settled and the field work begun next day. The two men would ride off early to a place about five miles north of here that used to be an ancient lake—so I was told. I don't know whether it did or not. It's dry enough now. It certainly can't be considered any part of our present water supply. They would take spades and hammers and magnifying glasses and fountain pens, and Oswald's cigar lighter and some lunch, and come back at night with a fine mess of these here trilobites and vertebræ and ganoids and petrified horseflies, and I don't know what all; mebbe oyster shells, or the footprints of a bird left in solid rock, or the outlines of starfish, or a shrimp that was fifty-two million years old and perfectly useless.

They seemed to have a good time. And Oswald would set up late writing remarks about the petrified game they had brought in.

I didn't used to see much of 'em, except at night when we'd gather for the evening meal. But their talk at those times did wonders for me. All about the aims of science and how we got here and what of it. The Prof was a bulky old boy, with long gray hair and long black eyebrows, and the habit of prevailing in argument. Him and Oswald never did agree on anything in my hearing, except the Chink's corn muffins; and they looked kind of mad at each other when they had to agree on them.

Take the age of this earth on which we make our living. They never got within a couple of hundred million years of each other. Oswald was strong for the earth's being exactly fifty-seven million years old. Trust him to have it down fine! And the old man hung out for four hundred million. They used to get all fussed up about this.

They quoted authorities. One scientist had figured

close and found it was fifty-six million years. And another, who seemed to be a headliner in the world of science, said it was between twenty million and four hundred million, with a probability of its being ninety-eight million. I kind of liked that scientist. He seemed so human, like a woman in a bean-guessing contest at the county fair. But still another scientist had horned in with a guess of five hundred million years, which was at least easy to remember.

Of course I never did much but listen, even when they argued this thing that I knew all about; for back in Fredonia, New York, where I went to Sunday-school, it was settled over fifty years ago. Our dear old pastor told us the earth was exactly six thousand years old. But I let the poor things talk on, not wanting to spoil their fun. When one of 'em said the world was made at least fifty-seven million years ago I merely said it didn't look anywhere near as old as that, and let it go.

We had some merry little meals for about a month. If it wasn't the age of God's footstool it would be about what we are descended from, the best bet in sight being that it's from fishes that had lungs and breathed under water as easy as anything, which at least put dimmers on that old monkey scandal in our ancestry. Or, after we moved outside on the porch, which we had to do on account of Oswald smoking the very worst cigars he was able to find in all the world, they would get gabby about all things in the world being simply nothing, which is known to us scientists as metaphysics.

Metaphysics is silly-simple—like one, two, three. It consists of subject and object. I only think I'm knitting this here sock. There ain't any sock here and there ain't any me. We're illusions. The sound of that Chink washing dishes out in the kitchen is a mere sensation inside my head. So's the check for eighty

dollars I will have to hand him on the first of the month —though the fool bank down in Red Gap will look on it with uneducated eyes and think it's real. Philosophers have dug into these matters and made 'em simple for us. It took thousands of books to do it; but it's done at last. Everything is nothing. Ask any scientist; he'll make it just as clear to you as a mist in a fog.

And even nothing itself ain't real. They go to that extreme. Not even empty space is real. And the human mind can't comprehend infinite space. I got kind of hot when one of 'em said that. I asked 'em right off whether the human mind could comprehend space that had an end to it. Of course it can't comprehend anything else but infinite space. I had 'em, all right; they had to change the subject. So they switched over to free will. None of us has it.

That made me hot again. I told 'em to try for even five minutes and see if they could act as if they didn't have the power of choice. Of course I had 'em again. Mebbe there ain't free will, but we can't act as if there wasn't. Those two would certainly make the game of poker impossible if folks believed 'em.

I nearly broke up the party that night. I said it was a shame young men was being taught such stuff when they could just as well go to some good agricultural college and learn about soils and crops and what to do in case of a sick bull. Furthermore, I wanted to know what they would do to earn their daily bread when they'd got everything dug up and labelled. Pretty soon they'd have every last organic remains put into a catalogue, the whole set complete and unbroken—and then what? They'd be out of a job.

The Prof laughed and said let the future take care of itself. He said we couldn't tell what might happen, because, as yet, we was nothing really but supermon-

keys. That's what he called our noble race—super-monkeys! So I said yes; and these here philosophers that talked about subject and object and the nothingness of nothing reminded me of monkeys that get hold of a looking-glass and hold it up and look into it, and then sneak one paw round behind the glass to catch the other monkey. So he laughed again and said "Not bad, that!"

You could kid the Prof, which is more than I can say for Oswald. Oswald always took a joke as if you'd made it beside the casket holding all that was mortal of his dear mother. In the presence of lightsome talk poor Oswald was just a chill. He was an eater of spoon-meat, and finicking. He could talk like Half Hours With the World's Best Authors, and yet had nothing to say but words.

Still, I enjoyed them evenings. I learned to be interested in vital questions and to keep up with the world's best thought, in company with these gents that was a few laps ahead of it. But not so with the motherless chit. This here Lydia made no effort whatever to keep up with the world's best thought. She didn't seem to care if she never perfected her intellect. It would of been plain to any eye that she was spreading a golden mesh for the Oswald party; yet she never made the least clumsy effort to pander to his high ideals.

She was a wonder, that girl! All day she would set round the house, with her hair down, fixing over a lace waist or making fudge, and not appearing to care much about life. Come night, when the party was due to return, she would spry up, trick herself out in something squashy, with the fashionable streamlike effect and a pretty pair of hammock stockings with white slippers, and become an animated porch wren. That seemed to be the limit of her science.

Most motherless chits would of pretended a feverish interest in the day's hunt for fossil cockroaches, and would even of gone out to chip off rocks with a hammer; but not Lydia. She would never pretend to the least infatuation for organic remains, and would, like as not, strike up something frivolous on her ukulele while Oswald was right in the middle of telling all about the secret of life. She was confident all the time, though, like she already had him stuffed and mounted. She reminded me of that girl in the play What Every Woman Thinks She Knows.

Lydia had great ideas of cooking, which is an art to ensnare males. She said she was a dandy cook and could makè Saratoga chips that was all to the Kenosha —whatever that meant. Think of it—Saratoga chips! Over eight hundred ways to cook potatoes, and all good but one; and, of course, she'd have to hit on this only possible way to absolutely ruin potatoes. She could cook other things, too—fudge and stuffed eggs and cheese straws, the latter being less than no food at all. It gives you a line on her.

I suppose it was all you could expect from a born débutante that had been brought up to be nice to college boys on a moonlit porch, allowing them to put another sofa pillow back of her, and wearing their class pins, and so forth. And here she was come to thirty, with fudge and cheese straws and the ukulele still bounding her mental horizon, yet looking far above her station to one of Oswald's serious magnitude.

I never have made out what she saw in him. But then we never do. She used to kid about him—and kid him, for that matter. She'd say to me: "He does care frightfully about himself, doesn't he?" And she said to me and said to him that he had mice in his wainscoting. Mice or rats, I forget which. Any wise book-

maker would of posted her up in this race as a hundred-to-one shot. She had plenty of blandishment for Oswald, but not his kind. She'd try to lure him with furtive femininity and plaintive melodies when she ought to have been putting on a feverish interest in organic fauna. Oswald generally looked through or past her. He give a whole lot more worry to whether his fountain pen would clog up on him. They was both set in their ways, and they was different ways; it looked to me like they never could meet. They was like a couple of trained seals that have learned two different lines of tricks.

Of course Oswald was sunk at last, sunk by a chance shot; and there was no doubt about his being destroyed, quantities of oil marking the surface where he went down. But it seemed like pure chance. Yet, if you believe Oswald and scientific diagnosis, he'd been up against it since the world was first started, twenty million or five hundred million years ago—I don't really know how many; but what's a few million years between scientists? I don't know that I really care. It's never kept me wakeful a night yet. I'd sooner know how to get eighty-five per cent. of calves.

Anyway, it was Oswald's grand new wardrobe trunk that had been predestined from the world's beginning to set him talkative about his little flower with bones and a voice; this same new wardrobe trunk that was the pride of his barren life and his one real worry because he might sometime lose the keys to it.

It's an affecting tale. It begun the night Oswald wanted the extra table put in his room. They'd come in that day with a good haul of the oldest inhabitants round here that had passed to their long rest three million years ago—petrified fishworms and potato bugs, and so forth, and rocks with bird tracks on 'em. Oswald was as near human as I'd seen him, on account of having

found a stone caterpillar or something—I know it had a name longer than it was; it seemed to be one like no one else had, and would therefore get him talked about, even if it had passed away three million years before the Oregon Short Line was built.

And Oswald went on to ask if he could have this extra table in his room, because these specimens of the disturbed dead was piling up on him and he wanted to keep 'em in order. He had lighted one of his terrible cigars; so I said I would quickly go and see about a table. I said that with his venomous cigar going I would quickly have to go and see about something or else have my olfactory nerve resected, which was a grand scientific phrase I had brightly picked out and could play with one finger. It means having something done so you can't smell any more.

The Prof laughed heartily, but Oswald only said he hadn't supposed I would feel that way, considering the kind of tobacco my own cigarettes was made of, though he was sorry and would hereafter smoke out of doors. He took a joke like a child taking castor oil. Anyway, I went out and found a spare table in the storeroom, and the Chink took it to Oswald's room.

The fateful moment was at hand for which Nature had been conspiring all these ages. The Chink held the table up against him, with the legs sticking out, and Oswald went ahead to show him where to put it. Close by the door, inside his room, was the lovely, yawning new trunk. Oswald must of been afraid one of the table legs would spear it and mar its fair varnish. He raised one hand to halt the table, then closed the trunk tenderly, snapped the lock, and moved it over into the corner, beyond chance of desecration.

Then he give careful directions for placing the table, which had to be carried round the foot of the bed and

past another table, which held marine fossils and other fishbones. It was placed between this table and still another, which held Oswald's compass and microscope and his kill-kare kamp stove and his first-aid kit and his sportsman's belt safe—all neatly arranged in line. I had followed to see if there was anything more he needed, and he said no, thank you. So I come out here to look over my mail that had just come.

Ten minutes later I felt the presence of a human being and looked up to see that Oswald, the oldest living boy scout, was dying on his feet in the doorway there. His face looked like he had been in jail three years. I thought he had seen a ghost or had a heart shock. He looked as if he was going to keel over. He had me scared. Finally he dragged himself over to the table here and says faintly:

"I believe I should like a severe drink of whisky!"

I didn't ask any questions. I saw it must be some private grief; so I got the whisky. It happened I had just one bottle in the house, and that was some perfectly terrible whisky that had been sent me by mistake. It was liquid barbed wire. Even a little drink of it would of been severe. Two drinks would make you climb a tree like a monkey. But the stricken Oswald seemed able to outfight it. He poured out half a tumblerful, drunk it neat and refused water. He strangled some, for he was only human after all. Then he sagged down on the couch and looked up at me with a feeble and pathetic grin and says:

"I'm afraid I've done something. I'm really afraid I have."

He had me in a fine state by this time. The only thing I could think of was that he had killed the Prof by accident. I waited for the horrible details, being too scared to ask questions.

"I'm afraid," he says, "that I've locked the keys of my new trunk inside of it. I'm afraid I really have! And what does one do in such a case?"

I nearly broke down then. I was in grave danger of fatal hysterics. I suffered from the reaction. I couldn't trust myself; so I got over to the door, where my face wouldn't show, and called to the Prof and Lydia. I now heard them out on the porch. Then I edged outside the door, where people wouldn't be quite so scared if I lost control of myself and yelled.

Then these two went in and listened to Oswald's solemn words. The Prof helped me out a lot. He yelled good. He yelled his head off; and under cover of his tumult I managed to get in a few whoops of my own, so that I could once more act something like a lady when I went in.

Lydia, the porch wren, was the only one to take Oswald's bereavement at all decent. The chit was sucking a stick of candy she had shoved down into a lemon. Having run out of town candy, one of the boys had fetched her some of the old-fashioned stick kind, with pink stripes; she would ram one of these down to the bottom of a lemon and suck up the juice through the candy. She looked entirely useless while she was doing this, and yet she was the only one to show any human sympathy.

She asked the stricken man how it happened, and he told the whole horrible story—how he always kept the keys hanging on this little brass hook inside the trunk so he would know where they was, and how he had shut the trunk in a hurry to get it out of the way of the table legs, and the spring lock had snapped. And what did one do now—if anything?

"Why, it's perfectly simple! You open it some other way," says Lydia.

"Ah, but how?" says Oswald. "Those trunks are superbly built. How can one?"

"Oh, it must be easy," says Lydia, still clinging to her candy sour. "I'll open it for you to-morrow if you will remind me."

"Remind you?" says Oswald in low, tragic tones. You could see he was never going to think of anything else the rest of his life.

By this time the Prof and I had controlled our heartless merriment; so we all traipsed in to the scene of this here calamity and looked at the shut trunk. It was shut good; no doubt about that. There was also no doubt about the keys being inside.

"You can hear them rattle!" says the awed Oswald, teetering the trunk on one corner. So each one of us took a turn and teetered the trunk back and forth and heard the imprisoned keys jingle against the side where they was hung.

"But what's to be done?" says Oswald. "Of course something must be done." That seemed to be about where Oswald got off.

"Why, simply open it some other way," says Lydia, which seemed to be about where she got off, too.

"But how?" moans the despairing man. And she again says:

"Oh, it must be too simple!"

At that she was sounding the only note of hope Oswald could hear; and right then I believe he looked at her fair and square for the first time in his life. He was finding a woman his only comforter in his darkest hour.

The Prof took it lightly indeed. He teetered the trunk jauntily and says:

"Your device was admirable; you will always know where those keys are." Then he teetered it again and

says, like he was lecturing on a platform: "This is an ideal problem for the metaphysical mind. Here, veritably, is life itself. We pick it up, we shake it, and we hear the tantalizing key to existence rattle plainly just inside. We know the key to be there; we hear it in every manifestation of life. Our problem is to think it out. It is simple, as my child has again and again pointed out. Sit there before your trunk and think effectively, with precision. You will then think the key out. I would take it in hand myself, but I have had a hard day."

Then Lydia releases her candy long enough to say how about finding some other trunk keys that will unlock it. Oswald is both hurt and made hopeful by this. He don't like to think his beautiful trunk could respond to any but its rightful key; it would seem kind of a slur against its integrity. Still, he says it may be tried. Lydia says try it, of course; and if no other key unlocks it she will pick the lock with a hairpin. Oswald is again bruised by this suggestion; but he bears up like a man. And so we dig up all the trunk keys and other small keys we can find and try to fool that trunk. And nothing doing!

"I was confident of it," says Oswald; he's really disappointed, yet proud as Punch because his trunk refuses coldly to recognize these strange keys.

Then Lydia brings a bunch of hairpins and starts to be a burglar. She says in clear tones that it is perfectly simple; and she keeps on saying exactly this after she's bent the whole pack out of shape and not won a trick. Yet she cheered Oswald a lot, in spite of her failures. She never for one instant give in that it wasn't simple to open a trunk without the key.

But it was getting pretty late for one night, so Oswald and Lydia knocked off and set out on the porch a while.

Oswald seemed to be awakening to her true woman's character, which comes out clad in glory at times when things happen. She told him she would sure have that trunk opened to-morrow with some more hairpins—or something.

But in the morning she rushed to Oswald and said they would have the blacksmith up to open it. He would be sure to open it in one minute with a few tools; and how stupid of her not to of thought of it before! I liked that way she left Oswald out of any brain work that had to be done. So they sent out to Abner to do the job, telling him what was wanted.

Abner is a simple soul. He come over with a hammer and a cold chisel to cut the lock off. He said there wasn't any other way. Oswald listened with horror to this cold-blooded plan of murder and sent Abner sternly away. Lydia was indignant, too, at the painful suggestion. She said Abner was a shocking old bounder.

Then Oswald had to go out to his field work; but his heart couldn't of been in it that day. I'll bet he could of found the carcass of a petrified zebra with seven legs and not been elated by it. He had only the sweet encouragement of Lydia to brace him. He was depending pathetically on that young woman.

He got back that night to find that Lydia had used up another pack of hairpins and a number of the tools from my sewing machine. All had been black failure, but she still said it was perfectly simple. She never lost the note of hope out of her voice. Oswald was distressed, but he had to regard her more and more like an object of human interest.

She now said it was a simple matter of more keys. So the next day I sent one of the boys down to Red Gap; and he rode a good horse to its finish and come back

with about five dozen nice little trunk keys with sawed edges. They looked cheerful and adequate, and we spent a long, jolly evening trying 'em out. Not one come anywhere near getting results.

Oswald's trunk was still haughty, in spite of all these overtures. Oswald was again puffed up with pride, it having been shown that his trunk was no common trunk. He said right out that probably the only two keys in all the world that would open that lock was the two hanging inside. He never passed the trunk without rocking it to hear their sad tinkle.

Lydia again said, nonsense! It was perfectly simple to open a trunk without the right key. Oswald didn't believe her, and yet he couldn't help taking comfort from her. I guess that was this girl's particular genius —not giving up when everyone else could see that she was talking half-witted. Anyway, she was as certain as ever, and I guess Oswald believed her in spite of himself. His ponderous scientific brain told him one thing in plain terms, and yet he was leaning on the words of a chit that wouldn't know a carboniferous vertebra from an Upper Silurian gerumpsus.

The keys had gone back, hairpins was proved to be no good, and scientific analysis had fell down flat. There was the trunk and there was the keys inside; and Oswald was taking on a year in age every day of his life. He was pretty soon going to be as old as the world if something didn't happen. He'd got so that every time he rocked the trunk to hear the keys rattle he'd shake his head like the doctor shakes it at a moving-picture deathbed to show that all is over. He was in a pitch-black cavern miles underground, with one tiny candle beam from a possible rescuer faintly showing from afar, which was the childish certainty of this oldest living débutante that it was perfectly simple for a

woman to do something impossible. She was just blue-eyed confidence.

After the men left one morning on their hunt for long-defunct wood ticks and such, Lydia confided to me that she was really going to open that trunk. She was going to put her mind on it. She hadn't done this yet, it seemed, but to-day she would.

"The poor boy has been rudely jarred in his academic serenity," says she. "He can't bear up much longer; he has rats in his wainscoting right now. It makes me perfectly furious to see a man so helpless without a woman. To-day I'll open his silly old trunk for him."

"It will be the best day's work you ever done," I says, and she nearly blushed.

"I'm not thinking of that," she says.

The little liar! As if she hadn't seen as well as I had how Oswald was regarding her with new eyes. So I wished her good luck and started out myself, having some field work of my own to do that day in measuring a lot of haystacks down at the lower end of the ranch.

She said there would be no luck in it—nothing but cool determination and a woman's intuition. I let it go at that and went off to see that I didn't get none of the worst of it when this new hay was measured. I had a busy day, forgetting all scientific problems and the uphill fight our sex sometimes has in bringing a man to his just mating sense.

I got back about five that night. Here was Miss Lydia, cool and negligent on the porch, like she'd never had a care in the world; fresh dressed in something white and blue, with her niftiest hammock stockings, and tinkling the ukulele in a bored and petulant manner.

"Did you open it?" I says as I went in.

"Open it?" she says, kind of blank. "Oh, you mean

that silly old trunk! Yes, I believe I did. At least I think I did."

It was good stage acting; an audience would of thought she had forgotten. So I took it as calm as she did and went in to change.

By the time I got out the men was just coming in, the Prof being enthusiastic about some clamshells of the year six million B. C. and Oswald bearing his great sorrow with an effort to do it bravely.

Lydia nodded distantly and then ignored the men in a pointed way, breaking out into rapid chatter to me about the lack of society up here—didn't I weary of the solitude, never meeting people of the right sort? It was a new line with her and done for effect, but I couldn't see what effect.

Supper was ready and we hurried in to it; so I guess Oswald must of forgot for one time to shake his trunk and listen to the pretty little keys. And all through the meal Lydia confined her attentions entirely to me. She ignored Oswald mostly, but if she did notice him she patronized him. She was painfully superior to him, and severe and short, like he was a little boy that had been let to come to the table with the grown-ups for this once. She rattled along to me about the club dances at home, and how they was going to have better music this year, and how the assembly hall had been done over in a perfectly dandy colour scheme by the committee she was on, and a lot of girlish babble that took up much room but weighed little.

Oswald would give her side looks of dumb appeal from time to time, for she had not once referred to anything so common as a trunk. He must of felt that her moral support had been withdrawn and he was left to face the dread future alone. He probably figured that she'd had to give up about the trunk and was di-

verting attention from her surrender. He hardly spoke a word and disappeared with a look of yearning when we left the table. The rest of us went out on the porch. Lydia was teasing the ukulele when Oswald appeared a few minutes later, with great excitement showing in his worn face.

"I can hear the keys no longer," says he; "not a sound of them! Mustn't they have fallen from the hook?"

Lydia went on stripping little chords from the strings while she answered him in lofty accents.

"Keys?" she says. "What keys? What is the man talking of? Oh, you mean that silly old trunk! Are you really still maundering about that? Of course the keys aren't there! I took them out when I opened it to-day. I thought you wanted them taken out. Wasn't that what you wanted the trunk open for—to get the keys? Have I done something stupid? Of course I can put them back and shut it again if you only want to listen to them."

Oswald had been glaring at her with his mouth open like an Upper Triassic catfish. He tried to speak, but couldn't move his face, which seemed to be frozen. Lydia goes on dealing off little tinkles of string music in a tired, bored way and turns confidentially to me to say she supposes there is really almost no society up here in the true sense of the word.

"You opened that trunk?" says Oswald at last in tones like a tragedian at his big scene.

Lydia turned to him quite prettily impatient, as if he was something she'd have to brush off in a minute.

"Dear, dear!" she says. "Of course I opened it. I told you again and again it was perfectly simple. I don't see why you made so much fuss about it."

Oswald turned and galloped off to his room with a

glad shout. That showed the male of him, didn't it?—not staying for words of gratitude to his saviour, but beating it straight to the trunk.

Lydia got up and swaggered after him. She had been swaggering all the evening. She acted like a duchess at a slumming party. The Prof and I followed her.

Oswald was teetering the trunk in the old familiar way, with one ear fastened to its shiny side.

"It's true! It's true!" he says in hushed tones. "The keys are gone."

"Naughty, naughty!" says Lydia. "Haven't I told you I took them out?"

Oswald went over and set limply down on his bed, while we stood in the doorway.

"How did you ever do it?" says he with shining eyes.

"It was perfectly simple," says Lydia. "I simply opened it—that's all!"

"I have always suspected that the great secret of life would be almost too simple when once solved," says the Prof.

"It only needed a bit of thought," says the chit.

Then Oswald must of had a sudden pang of fear. He flew over and examined the lock and all the front surface of his treasure. He was looking for signs of rough work, thinking she might of broken into it in some coarse manner. But not a scratch could he find. He looked up at Lydia out of eyes moist with gratitude.

"You wonderful, wonderful woman!" says he, and any one could know he meant it from the heart out.

Lydia was still superior and languid, and covered up a slight yawn. She said she was glad if any little thing she could do had made life pleasanter for him. This has been such a perfectly simple thing—very, very far from wonderful.

Oswald now begun to caper round the room like an Airedale pup, and says let's have the keys and open the trunk up, so he can believe his own eyes.

Then Lydia trifled once more with a human soul. She froze in deep thought a long minute then says:

"Oh, dear! Now what did I do with those wretched old keys?"

Oswald froze, too, with a new agony. Lydia put a hand to her pale forehead and seemed to try to remember. There was an awful silence. Oswald was dashed over the cliff again.

"Can't you think?" says the wounded man. "Can't you remember? Try! Try!"

"Now let me see," says Lydia. "I know I had them out in the living room——"

"Why did you ever take them out there?" demands Oswald in great terror; but the heroine pays no attention whatever to this.

"—and later, I think—I think—I must have carried them into my room. Oh, yes; now I remember I did. And then I emptied my wastebasket into the kitchen stove. Now I wonder if they could have been in with that rubbish I burned! Let me think!" And she thought again deeply.

Oswald give a hollow groan, like some of the very finest chords in his being had been tore asunder. He sunk limp on the bed again.

"Wouldn't it be awkward if they were in that rubbish?" says Lydia. "Do you suppose that fire would destroy the silly things? Let me think again."

The fiend kept this up for three minutes more. It must of seemed longer to Oswald than it takes for a chinch bug to become a carboniferous Jurassic. She was committing sabotage on him in the cruellest way. Then, after watching his death agony with cold eyes

and pretending to wonder like a rattled angel, she brightens up and says:

"Oh, goody! Now I remember everything. I placed them right here." And she picked the keys off the table, where they had been hid under some specimens of the dead and gone.

Oswald give one athletic leap and had the precious things out of her feeble grasp in half a second. His fingers trembled horrible, but he had a key in the lock and turned it and threw the sides of the grand old monument wide open. He just hung there a minute in ecstasy, fondling the keys and getting his nerve back. Then he turns again on Lydia the look of a proud man who is ready to surrender his whole future life to her keeping.

Lydia had now become more superior than ever. She swaggered round the room, and when she didn't swagger she strutted. And she says to Oswald:

"I'm going to make one little suggestion, because you seem so utterly helpless: You must get a nice doormat to lay directly in front of your trunk, and you must always keep the key under this mat. Lock the trunk and hide the key there. It's what people always do, and it will be quite safe, because no one would ever think of looking under a doormat for a key. Now isn't that a perfectly darling plan?"

Oswald had looked serious and attentive when she begun this talk, but he finally got suspicious that she was making some silly kind of a joke. He grinned at her very foolish and again says: "You wonderful woman!" It was a caressing tone—if you know what I mean.

Lydia says "Oh, dear, won't he ever stop his silly chatter about his stupid old trunk?" It seems to her that nothing but trunk has been talked of in this house

for untold ages. She's tired to death of the very word. Then she links her arm in mine in a sweet girlish fashion and leads me outside, where she becomes a mere twittering porch wren once more.

Oswald followed, you can bet. And every five minutes he'd ask her how did she ever—really now—open the trunk. But whenever he'd ask she would put the loud pedal on the ukulele and burst into some beachy song about You and I Together in the Moonlight, Love. Even the Prof got curious and demanded how she had done what real brains had failed to pull off—and got the same noisy answer. Later he said he had been wrong to ask. He said the answer would prove to be too brutally simple, and he always wanted to keep it in his thought life as a mystery. It looked like he'd have to. I was dying to know myself, but had sense enough not to ask.

The girl hardly spoke to Oswald again that night, merely giving him these cold showers of superiority when he would thrust himself on her notice. And she kept me out there with her till bedtime, not giving the happy trunk owner a chance at her alone. That girl had certainly learned a few things beyond fudge and cheese straws in her time. She knew when she had the game won.

Sure, it was all over with Oswald. He had only one more night when he could call himself a free man; he tried hard enough not to have even that. He looked like he wanted to put a fence round the girl, elk-high and bull-tight. Of course it's possible he was landed by the earnest wish to find out how she had opened his trunk; but she never will tell him that. She discussed it calmly with me after all was over. She said poor Oswald had been the victim of scientific curiosity, but really it was time for her to settle down.

We was in her room at the time and she was looking at the tiny lines round her eyes when she said it. She said, further, that she was about to plan her going-away gown. I asked what it would be, and she said she hadn't decided yet, but it would be something youth-giving. Pretty game, that was! And now Oswald has someone to guard his trunk keys for him—to say nothing of this here new specimen of organic fauna.

Then I talked. I said I was unable to reach the lofty altitude of the Prof when even a fair mystery was concerned. I was more like Oswald with his childish curiosity. How, then, did the young woman open the trunk? Of course I could guess the answer. She had found she could really do it with a hairpin, and had held off for effect. Still, I wanted to be told.

"Nothing easy like that," said Ma Pettengill. "She'd been honest with the hairpins. She didn't tell me till the day before they were leaving. 'It was a perfectly simple problem, requiring only a bit of thought,' she says. 'It was the simple thing people do when they find their front door locked. They go round to the back of the house and pry up a kitchen window, or something.' She pledged me to secrecy, but I guess you won't let it go any farther.

"Anyway, this is what she done: It was a time for brutal measures, so she'd had Abner wheel that trunk over to the blacksmith shop and take the hinges off. Abner just loves to do any work he don't have to do, and he had entered cordially into the spirit of this adventure. It used up his whole day, for which he was drawing three dollars from me. He took off one side of four pair of hinges, opened the trunk at the back far enough to reach in for the keys, unlocked it and fastened the hinges back on again.

"It was some job. These hinges was riveted on and didn't come loose easy. The rear of that trunk must of been one sad mutilation. It probably won't ever again be the trunk it once was. Abner had to hustle to get through in one day. I wish I could get the old hound to work for me that way. They'd just got the trunk back when I rode in that night. It was nervy, all right! I asked her if she wasn't afraid he would see the many traces of this rough work she had done.

"'Not a chance on earth!' says Lydia. 'I knew he would never look at any place but the front. He has the mind of a true scientist. It wouldn't occur to him in a million years that there is any other way but the front way to get into a trunk. I painted over the rivets and the bruises as well as I could, but I'm sure he will never look there. He may notice it by accident in the years to come, but the poor chap will then have other worries, I hope.'

"Such was the chit. I don't know. Mebbe woman has her place in the great world after all. Anyway, she'll be a help to Oswald. Whatever he ain't she is."

VII

CHANGE OF VENUS

MA PETTENGILL and I rode labouring horses up a steep way between two rocky hillsides that doubled the rays of the high sun back upon us and smothered the little breeze that tried to follow us up from the flat lands of the Arrowhead. We breathed the pointed smell of the sage and we breathed the thick, hot dust that hung lazily about us; a dust like powdered chocolate, that cloyed and choked.

As recreation it was blighting; and I said almost as much. Ma Pettengill was deaf to it, her gray head in its broad-brimmed hat sternly bowed in meditation as she wove to her horse's motion. Then I became aware that she talked to another; one who was not there. She said things I was sure he would not have liked to hear. She hung choice insults upon his name and blistered his fair repute with calumnies. She was a geyser of invective, quiet perhaps for fifty yards, then grandly in action.

"Call yourself a cowman, hey? What you ought to be is matron of a foundling asylum. Yes, sir!"

This was among the least fearful of her dusty scornings. And I knew she would be addressing one Homer Gale, temporary riding boss of the Arrowhead. Indeed, Homer's slightly pleading accents were now very colourably imitated by his embittered employer:

"'Yes'm, Mis' Pettengill, it's a matter of life and death; no less. I got to git off for two days—a matter of life and death. Yes'm; I just got to!'"

On the completion of this a hoarse hoot of scorn boomed through the haze and Homer was told that men like himself often caused perfectly decent people to be tried for murder. And again Homer's rightful job was echoed as "Matron of a foundling asylum!"

I felt the embarrassment of one unwittingly come upon the adjustment of a private grievance. I dropped delicately a few paces behind, unnoticed, I thought; but Ma Pettengill waited for me to overtake her again.

Then, as we pushed through the dust together, she told me that her days were swifter than a weaver's shuttle and spent without hope. If it wasn't one thing it was another. What she'd like—she'd like to wake up in a strange place and find she'd clean forgot her name and address, like these here parties you read about in the papers. And why wouldn't she? A dry year; feed short on the range; water holes dusty that never did go dry before; half a hay crop and winter threatening right spang in the summertime! Think of having to gather cattle off the range in the middle of August when other times you could let 'em run till the middle of October! In fact, this was the kind of a year that cattle raisers had a technical term for. It was known technically as one hell of a year, if I wanted to be told.

And having to do the work with mental defectives and cripples and Bolsheviki, because every able-bodied puncher in the country had gone over to create a disturbance in Europe! Hadn't she combed out the county hospital and poor farm to get a haying crew? Didn't the best cowboy now on the pay roll wear a derby hat and ride a motorcycle by preference? And paying seventy-five dollars to these imitation punchers to fight her gentle saddle horses, no colt, it seemed, having been ridden on the place in the memory of man.

She didn't know; taking one thing with another, sometimes she almost wished that the world was going to stay unsafe for democracy.

Of course this technically described bad year wasn't so bad one way, because the sheepmen would sure get a tasty wallop, sheep being mighty informal about dying with the weather below zero and scant feed. When cattle wasn't hardly feeling annoyed sheep would lie down and quit intruding on honest cattle raisers for all time. Just a little attention from a party with a skinning knife was all they needed after that. And so on, back to Homer Gale, who had gone to Red Gap for two days on a matter of life and death—and of this the less repeated here the better.

Now our narrow way spread to a valley where the sun's rays were more widely diffused and the dust less pervasive. We could see a mile ahead to a vaster cloud of dust. This floated over a band of Arrowhead cattle being driven in from a range no longer sustaining. They were being driven by Bolsheviki, so my informant disclosed.

We halted above the road and waited for the dusty creatures to plod by us down to the pleasant lea where feed was still to be had and water was sweet. Then came the Bolshevik rear guard. It consisted of Silas Atterbury and four immature grandchildren.

Grandpa Atterbury was ninety-three and doing his first labour since he retired, at eighty-five. The grandchildren, two male and two female, should have been playing childish games. And they were Bolsheviki, all because they had refused to bring in this bunch of stock except for the wage customarily paid to trained adults. Even the youngest, known as Sissy Atterbury, aged eight and looking younger, despite her gray coating of powdered alkali, had tenaciously held out for a

grown man's pay, which made her something even worse than a Bolshevik; it made her an I. W. W.

But, as Ma Pettengill said, what could a lady do when Fate had a stranglehold on her. There was, indeed, nothing to do but tell Sissy to tell one of her incendiary brothers to get up close to grandpa, and yell good and loud at him, and make him understand he was to get a count on that bunch at the first gate, because it didn't look to us that there was over three hundred head where there ought to be at least five hundred.

And then there was nothing to do but ride ahead of the toiling beasts and again down the narrow way that would bring us to the lowlands of the Arrowhead, where the dust no longer choked and one could see green and smell water. From the last mesa we looked out over the Arrowhead's flat fields, six thousand acres under fence, with the ranch house and outbuildings hazy in the distance.

It was a pleasant prospect and warmed Ma Pettengill from her mood of chill negation. She remarked upon the goodliness of the scene, quite as if the present were not a technical year for cattle raisers. Then, as we jogged the six miles home by peaceful thoroughfares, the lady, being questioned persistently and suitably, spoke with utter freedom of Homer Gale, who had shamefully deserted his job for two days at the busiest end of the season, when a white man wouldn't of thought of leaving, even on a matter of life and death.

Had Homer the shadow of an excuse? We shall see.

Well, then, this here celluloid imitation of a cowman that I been using violent words about come into the valley three years ago and rapidly got a lot of fame by reason of being a confirmed bachelor and hating the young of the human species with bitterness and con-

stancy. I was the one that brought him in; I admit that. First time I seen him he was being a roistering blade in the Fashion Waffle Kitchen down at Red Gap. He was with Sandy Sawtelle and a couple other boys from the ranch here, and Sandy tells me later that he is looking for work, being a good cowhand. I said he looked like something else, being dressed in an uproarious check suit of clothes that would instantly of collected a crowd in most city streets. But Sandy says that's all right; he's a regler cowman and had to wear these startling garments for a disguise to get him safe out of Idaho.

It seems he'd been crowded out of that thriving state by a yearning and determined milliner that had witnesses a-plenty and intended to do something about it. Defendant claimed he hadn't even meant anything of the sort and was just being a good pal; but it looked like the cruel teeth of the law was going to bite right into his savings if this breach-of-promise suit ever come to trial, the lady having letters from him in black and white. So Homer had made a strategic retreat, avoiding contact with the enemy, and here he was. And how about taking him on at the Arrowhead, where he could begin a new life?

Needing another hand just then, I fussed none at all about Homer's scandalous past. I said he could throw in with us; and he did. When he got dressed in a legal manner he looked like he couldn't be anything else but a cowhand. About forty and reliable, he looked. So I sent him to a summer camp over on the Madeline plains, where I had a bunch of cattle on government range. Bert Glasgow lived in a shack with his wife and family there and had general charge, and Homer was to begin his new life by helping Bert.

His new life threatened to be short. He showed up

here late the third night after he went over, looking sad and desperate and hunted. He did look that way more or less at all times, having one of these long, sad moustaches and a kind of a bit-into face. This night he looked worse than usual. I thought the hellhounds of the law from Idaho might of took up his winding trail; but no. It was the rosy-cheeked tots of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Glasgow that had sent him out into the night.

"Say," he says, "I wouldn't have you think I was a quitter, but if you want to suicide me just send me back to that horrible place. Children!" he says. "That's all; just children! Dozens of 'em! Running all over the place, into everything, under everything, climbing up on you, sticking their fingers into your eyes—making life unbearable for man and beast. You never once let on to me," he says reproachfully, "that this Bert had children."

"No," I says; "and I never let on to you that he's got a mole on his chin either. What of that?"

Then the poor lollop tries to tell me what of it. I saw he really had been under a nervous strain, all right. Suffering had put its hot iron on him. First, he just naturally loathed children anyway. Hadn't he run away from a good home in Iowa when he was sixteen, account of being the oldest of seven? He said some things in general about children that would of got him no applause at a mothers' meeting. He was simply afraid to look a child in the eye; and, from what he'd like to do to 'em all, it seemed like his real middle name was Molech. Wasn't that the party with hostile views about children? Anyway, you could see that Homer's idea of a real swell festivity would be to hide out by an orphan asylum some night until the little ones had said their prayers and was tucked all peaceful into their trundle beds and then set fire to the edifice in eight

places after disconnecting the fire alarm. That was Homer, and he was honest; he just couldn't help it.

And Bert's tikes had drove him mad with their playful antics. He said he'd be set down for a bite of dinner and one of 'em would climb up his back and feel his hair—not saying a word, just taking hold of it; then it would jump down and another would climb up and do the same thing, and him not daring to defend himself. He'd got so worked up he was afraid to stay on the place.

"And you know," he says—"what I can't understand—danged if Bert don't seem to kind of like 'em. You may think I'm a liar, but he waited for one the other morning when it squealed at him and kept a hold of its hand clean down to the hay barn. What do you think of that? And besides these that go round infesting the place outside he's got a short yearling and a long two-year-old that have to be night-herded. I listened to 'em every night. One yelled and strangled all last night, till I s'posed, of course, it was going to perish everlastingly; but here this morning it was acting like nothing at all had happened.

"All I can say is, Bert don't have much luck. And that littlest yeller always unswallowing its meals with no effort whatever! It's horrible! And the mother, with no strength of character—feeble-minded, I reckon—coddles 'em! She never did cuss 'em out proper or act human toward 'em. Kids like them, what they need—upside down and three quick hard ones. I know!"

I was fool enough to argue with him a bit, trying to see if he didn't have a lick of sense. I told him to look how happy Bert was; and how his family had made a man of him, him getting more money and saving more than ever in his past life. Homer said what good would

all that money do him? He'd only fool it away on his wife and children.

"He regrets it, all right," says Homer. "I says to myself the other day: 'I bet a cookie he'd like to be carefree and happy like me!'"

Homer was a piker, even when he made bets with himself. And the short of it was I sent a man that didn't hate children over to Bert's and kept Homer on the place here.

He stayed three months and said it was heaven, account of not having them unnecessary evils on the place that would squirm round a man's legs and feel of his hair and hide round corners and peek at him and whisper about him. Then I changed foremen and Scott Humphrey, the new one, brought three towheads with him of an age to cause Homer the anguish of the damned, which they done on the first day they got here by playing that he was a horse and other wild animals, and trying to pull the rest of his hair out.

He come in and cut himself out of my life the day after, shaking his head and saying he couldn't think what the world was coming to. As near as I could make him, his idea was that the world was going to be swamped with young ones if something wasn't done about it, like using squirrel poison or gopher traps.

I felt like I wanted to cuff him up to a peak and knock the peak off; but I merely joked and said it was too bad his own folks hadn't come to think that way while he could still be handled easy. I also warned him it was going to be hard to find a job without more or less children on the outskirts, because ours was a growing state. He said there must be a few sane people left in the world. And, sure enough, he gets a job over to the Mortimers'—Uncle Henry and Aunt Mollie being past seventy and having nothing to distress Homer.

Of course the secret of this scoundrel's get-away from Idaho had got round the valley, making him a marked man. It was seen that he was a born flirt, but one who retained his native caution even at the most trying moments. Here and there in the valley was a hard-working widow that the right man could of consoled, and a few singles that would of listened to reason if properly approached; and by them it was said that Homer was a fiend for caution. He would act like one of them that simply won't take no for an answer—up to a certain point. He would seem to be going fur in merry banter, but never to words that the law could put any expensive construction on. He would ride round to different ranches and mingle at dances and picnics, and giggle and conduct himself like one doomed from the cradle to be woman's prey—but that was all.

Funny how he'd escaped through the years, him having apparently the weak and pliant nature that makes the ideal husband, and having reached the time of life when he was putting sheep dip on his hair where the lining shone through on top. But so it was. And his views on children had also become widely known. Mothers used to grab up their youngest ones when he'd go into the post office down at Kulanch or meet one on the road. He made no hit at all with such views among them that had learned better. Still there was hopeful ones that thought he might be made to take a joke sooner or later, and the fact that he was known to save his wages and had a nice little stake laid by didn't work against him any with such parties as might have a chance to be swept off their feet by him in a mad moment.

Then over at the Mortimers' place he meets Mrs. Judson Tolliver, a plausible widow lady who come into the valley every once in a while to do sewing round at

different ranches. She was a good-built, impressive person, with a persuading manner; one of these competent ones that can take charge of affairs and conduct them unassisted, and will do so if not stopped. Uncle Henry Mortimer brought her to the house in his light wagon one morning, with her sewing machine in the back. And Homer was there to help her out and help out with the machine and see it was placed right in the sitting room; and then help out with her satchel and ask in a gentlemanly manner if everything was all right —and everything was: Thank you so much, Mr. Gale!

This party was no simpering schoolgirl. She was thirty-five or so and square-jawed, and did her hair plain, and had a managing voice that would go good at club meetings. She read library books and was a good conversationalist. And what did she do the first evening, when Homer was mending one of his shirts by the kitchen lamp, but wrench it away from him roguishly and do the job herself, while she entertained him with conversation. It was bound to be entertaining, for she started in about what trials children was to their tormented parents and how the world would be brighter and better if it consisted entirely of adults.

Any one might of thought she'd been hearing gossip about Homer's likes and dislikes. I know that's what I thought afterward, when he opened his soul to me. She said what a mercy it was that half a dozen yelling demons wasn't in this house at that moment to make life an evil thing for all. And Homer sunned right up and took the talk away from her. While she done his mending he spoke heatedly of little children in his well-known happy vein, relating many incidents in his blasted career that had brought him to these views. The lady listened with deep attention, saying "Ah, yes, Mr. Gale!" from time to time, and letting on there

must be a strong bond of sympathy between them because he expressed in choice words what she had so often felt.

Homer must of been kind of swept off his feet at that very moment, and the rapids just below him. I guess he'd already been made mushy sentimental by seeing the ideal romantic marriage between Uncle Henry and his wife—forty years or so together and still able to set down in peace and quiet without having something squirm over you to see what you had in your pockets or ask what made your hair come out that funny way, till you wished a couple she-bears would rush out and devour forty-two of 'em.

It was the first of quite many evenings when Homer and the lady would set with a dish of apples and fried cakes between 'em and denounce the world's posterity. The lady was even suffering grave doubts about marriage. She said having to make her own way after she lost her husband had made her relish her independence too much to think of ever giving it up again lightly. Of course she wouldn't say that possibly at some time in the dim future a congenial mate that thought as she did on vital topics—and so forth—just enough to give Homer a feeling of security that was wholly unwarranted. Wasn't he the heedless Hugo?

He was quite wordy about the lady to me when he come over on an errand one day. He told me all about these delightful talks of theirs, and what an attractive person she was, sound as a nut, and companionable and good-looking without being one of these painted dolls. He said, to see her above her sewing, she was a lovely view that he never tired of gazing at, and to hear her loathe children was music to the ear. He said she was a rare woman. I said she must be and asked him if he had committed himself.

"Well, I don't say I have and I don't say I haven't," he says; "but here I be, standing with reluctant feet at the parting of the ways. And who knows what might happen? I know I've had some darned close shaves from doing a whole lot worse in my time."

So I wished him the best of luck with this lady child hater; not that I thought he'd really get what was coming to him. He was so crafty. He was one of them that love not well but too wisely, as the saying is. Still, there was a chance. He was scared to death of fire and yet he would keep on playing with it. Some day the merry old flames might lick him up. I hoped for the best.

A few days after that I went down to the foreman's house late in the afternoon to see him about a shipment we had to make. Scott was off somewhere, but his sister was in; so I set talking with her, and waiting. This here Minna Humphrey was a hectic, blighted girl of thirty, sandy-haired, green-eyed, and little—no bigger than a bar of soap after a day's washing. What had blighted the poor thing was having to teach public school for a dozen years. She'd been teaching down to Kulanche that year and had just closed up. We set out in front of the house and Minna told me she was all in; and how she'd ever got through the season she didn't know.

She went on to speak of little children. Fire in her voice? Murder! According to Minna, children had ought to be put in cages soon as they can walk and kept there till they are grown; fed through the bars and shot down if they break out. That's what twelve years' enforced contact with 'em had done to Minna's finer instincts. She said absolutely nothing in the world could be so repugnant to her as a roomful of the little animals writing on slates with squeaky pencils. She said other things about 'em that done her no credit.

And while I listened painfully who should be riding up but Homer Gale!

"Here," I says to Minna; "here's a man you'll be a joyous treat to; just let him come in and listen to your song a while. Begin at the beginning and say it all slow, and let Homer have some happy moments."

So I introduced the two, and after a few formalities was got over I had Minna telling in a heartfelt manner what teaching a public school was like, and what a tortured life she led among creatures that should never be treated as human. Homer listened with glistening eyes that got quite moist at the last. Minna went on to say that children's mothers was almost as bad, raging in to pick a fuss with her every time a child had been disciplined for some piece of deviltry. She said mothers give her pretty near as much trouble as the kids themselves.

It was a joyous and painful narrative to Homer. He said why didn't Minna take up something else? And Minna said she was going to. She'd been working two summers in Judge Ballard's office, down to Red Gap, and was going to again this summer, soon as she regained a little vitality; and she hoped now she'd have a steady job there and never have to go back to the old life of degradation. Homer sympathized warmly; his heart had really been touched. He hoped she'd rise out of the depths to something tolerable; and then he told her about Bert's five horrible children that drove him out into the brush—and so forth.

I listened in a while; and then I says to Homer ain't it nice for him to meet someone else that thinks as he does on this great vital topic, Minna seeming to find young ones as repulsive as Mrs. Judson Tolliver? And how about that lady anyway? And how is his affair

coming on? I never dreamed of starting anything. I was being friendly.

Homer gets vivacious and smirks something horrible, and says, well, he don't see why people make a secret of such things; and the fact is that that lady and him have about decided that Fate has flung 'em together for a lofty purpose. Of course nothing was settled definite yet—no dates nor anything; but probably before long there'd be a nice little home adorning a certain place he'd kept his eye on, and someone there keeping a light in the window for him—and so on. It sounded almost too good to be true that this old shellback had been harpooned at last.

Then Minna spoke up, when Homer had babbled to a finish, and smirked and looked highly offensive. She says brightly:

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Judson Tolliver. I know her well; and I'm sure, Mr. Gale, I wish you all the happiness in the world with the woman of your choice. She's a very sterling character indeed—and such a good mother!"

"How's that?" says Homer. "I didn't hear you just right. Such a good what?"

"I said she's such a good mother," Minna answers him.

Homer's smirk kind of froze on his face.

"Mother to what?" he says in a low, passionate tone, like an actor.

"Mother to her three little ones," says Minna. Then she says again quick: "Why, what's the matter, Mr. Gale?" For Homer seemed to have been took bad.

"Great Godfrey!" he says, hardly able to get his voice.

"And, of course, you won't mind my saying it," Minna goes on, "because you seem so broad-minded about children, but when I taught primary in Red Gap

last year those three little boys of hers gave me more trouble than any other two dozen of the pests in the whole room."

Homer couldn't say anything this time. He looked like a doctor was knifing him without anæsthetics.

"And to make it worse," says Minna, "the mother is so crazy about them, and so sensitive about any little thing done to them in the way of discipline—really, she has very little control of her language where those children are concerned. Still, of course, that's how any good mother will act, to be sure; and especially when they have no father.

"I'm glad indeed the poor woman is to have someone like you that will take the responsibility off her shoulders, because those boys are now at an age where discipline counts. Of course she'll expect you to be gentle with them, even though firm. Oswald—he's eleven now, I believe—will soon be old enough to send to reform school; but the younger ones, seven and nine—— My! such spirits as they have! They'll really need someone with strength."

Homer was looking as if this bright chatter would add twenty years to his age. He'd slumped down on the stoop, where he'd been setting, like he'd had a stroke.

"So she's that kind, is she?" he kind of mutters. "A good thing I found it out on her!"

"The children live with their grandmother in Red Gap while their mother is away," says Minna. "They really need a strong hand."

"Not mine!" says Homer. Then he got slowly up and staggered down a few steps toward the gate. "It's a good thing I found out this scandal on her in time," says he. "Talk about underhandedness! Talk about a woman hiding her guilty secret! Talk about infamy!

I'll expose her, all right. I'm going straight to her and tell her I know all. I'll make her cower in shame!" He's out on his horse with his reckless threat.

"Now you've sunk the ship," I says to Minna. "I knew the woman was leading a double life as fur as Homer was concerned, but I wasn't going to let on to the poor zany. It's time he was speared, and this would of been a judgment on him that his best friends would of relished keenly. Lots of us was looking forward to the tragedy with great pleasure. You spoiled a lot of fun for the valley."

"But it would not have been right," says Minna. "It would truly have been the blackest of tragedies to a man of Mr. Gale's sensitive fibres. You can't enter into his feelings because you never taught primary. Also, I think he is very far from being a poor zany, as you have chosen to call him." The poor thing was warm and valiant when she finished this, looking like Joan of Arc or someone just before the battle.

And Homer never went back and made the lady cower like he said he meant to. Mebbe it occurred to him on the way that she was not one of them that cower easy. Mebbe he felt he was dealing with a desperate adventuress, as cunning as she was false-hearted. Anyway, he weakened like so many folks that start off brave to tell someone so-and-so right to their faces. He didn't go back at all till the middle of the night, when he pussyfooted in and got his things out, and disappeared like he had stumbled down a well.

Uncle Henry had to feed his own stock next morning, while Mrs. Tolliver took on in great alarm and wanted a posse formed to rescue Homer from wherever he was. Her first idea was that he had been kidnapped and was being held for ransom; but someway she couldn't get any one else very hearty about this notion. So then

she said he had been murdered, or was lying off in the brush somewhere with a broken leg.

It was pointed out to her that Homer wouldn't be likely to come and collect all his things in the night in order to keep a date with an assassin, or even to have his leg broke. About the third day she guessed pretty close to the awful truth and spoke a few calm words about putting her case in the hands of some good lawyer.

The valley was interested. It looked like a chance for the laugh of the year. It looked like the lightnings of a just heaven had struck where they was long overdue. Then it was discovered that Homer was hiding out over in the hills with a man after coyotes with traps and poison. His job must of appealed to Homer's cynical nature at that moment—anything with traps and poison in it.

Dave Pickens was the man that found him, he not having much else to do. And he let Homer know the worst he could think of without mincing words. He said the deserted fiancée was going to bring suit against Homer for one hundred thousand dollars—that being the biggest sum Dave could think of—for breach of promise, and Homer might as well come out and face the music.

Homer did come out, bold as brass. He'd been afraid the lady might gun him or act violent with something; but if she wasn't threatening anything but legal violence he didn't care. He just couldn't conceive that a lady with three children could make a suit like that stick against any man—especially three children that was known to be hellions. He didn't even believe the lady would start a suit—not with the facts of her shame known far and wide. He was jaunty and defiant about this, and come right out of hiding and agreed to work for me again, Scott Humphrey having sent his wife and children on a visit to Grandma Humphrey.

But, lands. He didn't earn his salt. Friends and well-wishers took the jauntiness all out of him in no time. Parties rode from far and near to put him wise. Ranchers from ten miles up and down the creek would drop important work just to ride over and tell him harsh facts about the law, and how, as man to man, it looked dark indeed for him. These parties told him that the possession of three children by a lawful widow was not regarded as criminal by our best courts. It wasn't even considered shameful. And it was further pointed out by many of the same comforters that the children would really be a help to the lady in her suit, cinching the sympathy of a jury.

Also, they didn't neglect to tell him that probably half the jury would be women—wives and mothers. And what chance would he have with women when they was told how he regarded children? He spent a good half of the time I paid him for in listening to these friendly words. They give Homer an entirely new slant on our boasted civilization and lowered it a whole lot in his esteem.

About the only person in the whole valley that wasn't laughing at him and giving him false sympathy with a sting in its tail was Minna Humphrey. Homer told her all about the foul conspiracy against his fortune, and how his life would be blasted by marrying into a family with three outcasts like he'd been told these was. And what was our courts coming to if their records could be stained by blackmailers.

And Minna give him the honest sympathy of a woman who had taught school twelve years, loathed the sight of any human under twenty, and even considered that the institution of marriage had been greatly overpraised. Certainly she felt it was not for her; and she could understand Homer's wanting to escape. She

and him would set out and discuss his chances long after he had ought to of been in bed if he was going to earn his pay.

Minna admitted that things looked dark for him on account of the insane prejudice that would be against him for his views on children. She said he couldn't expect anything like a fair trial where these was known even with a jury of his peers; and it was quite true that probably only five or six of the jury would be his peers, the rest being women.

Homer told me about these talks—out of working hours, you can bet! How Minna was the only person round that would stand by any one in trouble; how she loathed kids, and even loathed the thought of human marriage.

"Minna is a nice girl," I told him; "but I should think you'd learn not to pay attention to a woman that talks about children that way. Remember this other lady talked the same way about 'em before the scandal come out."

But he was indignant that any one could suspect Minna's child hating wasn't honest.

"That little girl is pure as a prism!" he says. "When she says she hates 'em, she hates 'em. The other depraved creature was only working on my better nature."

"Well," I says, "the case does look black; but mebbe you could settle for a mere five thousand dollars."

"It wouldn't be a mere five thousand dollars," says Homer; "it would be the savings of a lifetime of honest toil and watching the pennies. That's all I got."

"Serves you right, then," I says, "for not having got married years ago and having little ones of your own about your knee!"

Homer shuddered painfully when I said this. He

started to answer something back, but just choked up and couldn't.

The adventuress had, of course, sent letters and messages to Homer. The early ones had been pleading, but the last one wasn't. It was more in the nature of a base threat if closely analyzed. Then she finished up her sewing at the Mortimers' and departed for Red Gap, leaving a final announcement to anybody it concerned that she would now find out if there was any law in the land to protect a defenseless woman in her sacred right to motherhood.

Homer shivered when he heard it and begun to think of making another getaway, like he had done from Idaho. He thought more about it when someone come back from town and said she was really consulting a lawyer.

He'd of gone, I guess, if Minna hadn't kept cheering him up with sympathy and hating children with him. Homer was one desperate man, but still he couldn't tear himself away from Minna.

Then one morning he gets a letter from the Red Gap lawyer. It says his client, Mrs. Judson Tolliver, has directed him to bring suit against Homer for five thousand dollars; and would Homer mebbe like to save the additional cost—which would be heavy, of course—by settling the matter out of court and avoiding pain for all?

Homer was in a state where he almost fell for this offer. It was that or facing a jury that would have it in for him, anyway, or disappearing like he had done in Idaho; only this lady was highly determined, and reports had already come to him that he would be watched and nailed if he tried to leave. It would mean being hounded from pillar to post, even if he did get away. He went down and put it up to Minna, as I heard later.

"I'm a desperate man," he says, "being hounded by this here catamount; and mebbe it's best to give in."

"It's outrageous!" says Minna. "Of course you don't care about the money; but it's the principle of the thing."

"Well, yes and no," says Homer. "You might say I care some about the money. That's plain nature, and I never denied I was human."

So they went on to discuss it back and forth warmly, when a misunderstanding arose that I was very careful to get the rights of a couple of weeks later.

Minna went over the old ground that Homer could never get a fair trial; then she brightened up all at once and says:

"Don't you pay it. Don't you do it; because you won't have to if you do what I say."

Homer gets excited and says:

"Yes, yes; go on!"

And Minna goes on.

"When people can't get fair trials in a place," she says, "they always take change of venues."

"Change of venues?" says Homer, kind of uneasy, it seemed.

"Certainly," says Minna: "they take change of venues. I've worked in Judge Ballard's office long enough to know that much. Why didn't I think of it before? It's your one chance to escape this creature's snare."

"Change of venues?" says Homer again, kind of aghast.

"It's your only way out," says Minna; "and I'll do everything I can——"

"You will?" says Homer.

"Why, of course!" says Minna. "Any thing——"

"All right, then," says Homer. "You get your

things on, and I'll saddle your horse and bring him round."

"What for?" demands Minna.

"I'm a desperate man!" says Homer. "You say it's the only way out, and you know the law; so come along to Kulanche with me." And he beat if off to the barn.

Well, Minna had said she'd do anything she could, thinking she'd write herself to Judge Ballard and find out all the details; but if Homer wanted her to go to Kulanche with him and try to start the thing there—why, all right. She was ready when Homer come with her horse and off they rode on the twelve-mile trip.

I gather that not much was said on the way by Homer who only muttered like a fever patient from time to time, with Minna saying once in a while how glad she was she had thought up this one sure way out of his trouble.

At Kulanche they rode up in front of Old Man Geiger's office, who is justice of the peace.

"Wait here a minute," says Homer, and went inside. Pretty soon he come out and got her. "Come on, now," he says, "I got it all fixed."

And Minna goes in, thinking mebbe she's got to swear to an affidavit or something that Homer couldn't get a fair trial among people knowing he regarded little ones as so many cockroaches or something to step on.

She got some shock when Homer took her inside and held her tight by the wrist while Old Man Geiger married 'em. That's about the way it was. She says she was so weak she could hardly stand up, and she hadn't hardly any voice at all left. But she kept on saying "Why, Homer!" and "Oh, Homer!" and "No, no, Homer!" as soon as she discovered that she had been dragged off to a fate she had always regarded as worse

than death; but a lot of good it done her to say them things in a voice not much better than a whisper.

And the dreadful thing was over before she could get strength to say anything more powerful. There she was, married to a man she thought highly of, it's true, and had a great sympathy for in the foul wrong one of her sex had tried to slip over on him; but a man she had never thought of marrying. I'm telling you what she told me. And after sentence had been pronounced she kept on saying "Why, Homer!" and "Oh, Homer!" and "No, no, Homer!" till there was nothing to do but get some clothes out of her trunk that she'd left down there in time to take the narrow gauge for their wedding tour to Spokane.

The news spread over the valley next day like a brush fire in August. It was startling! Like the newspapers say of a suicide, "No cause could be assigned for the rash act." They was away ten days and come back to find the whole country was again giving Homer the laugh because Mrs. Tolliver had up and married a prosperous widower from over in Surprise Valley, and had never brought any suit against him. It was said that even the late Mrs. Tolliver was laughing heartily at him.

Homer didn't seem to care, and Minna certainly didn't. She was the old-fashioned kind of wife, a kind you don't hear much of nowadays; the kind that regards her husband as perfect, and looks up to him. She told me about the tumultuous wedding. Neither of 'em had had time for any talk till they got on the train. Then it come out. She says why ever did Homer do such a monstrous thing? And Homer says:

"Well, you told me a change of Venus was the only way out for me——"

"I said a change of venue," says Minna.

"It sounded like change of Venus," says Homer,

"and I knew Venus was the god of love. And you said you was willing and I knew we was congenial, and I was a desperate man; and so here we are!"

So she cried on his shoulder for twenty miles while he ate a box of figs.

Homer is now a solid citizen, with his money put into a place down at the lower end of the valley, instead of lying in the bank at the mercy of some unscrupulous woman with little ones. And here this summer, with his own work light, he's been helping me out as riding boss; or, at least I been lavishing money on him for that.

A fine, dependable hand, too! Here was this bunch of stock to be got in from Madeline—them Bolshevik ain't gathered more'n two thirds of 'em; and there's more to come in from over Horse Fly Mountain way, and still another bunch from out of the Sheep Creek country—the busiest month in a bad year, when I needed every man, woman, and child to be had, and here comes Homer, the mush-head, taking two days off!

"Yes'm, Mis' Pettengill; I just got to take time off to go down to Red Gap. It's a matter of life and death. Yes'm; it is. No'm; I wouldn't dast send any one, and Minna agrees I'm the only one to go——" Shucks!

The lady built a cigarette and, after lighting it, turned back to scan the mesa we had descended. The cattle now crowded down the narrow way into the valley, their dust mounting in a high, slow cloud.

"Call yourself a cowman, do you?" she demanded of the absent Homer. "Huh!" Then we rode on.

"What was the matter of life and death?" I asked.

Ma Pettengill expelled cigarette smoke venomously from inflated nostrils like a tired dragon.

"The matter of life and death was that he had to get two teething rings for the twins."

"Twins!"

"Oh, the valley got it's final laugh at Homer! Twins, sure! Most of us laughed heartily, though there was mothers that said it was God's judgment on the couple. Of course Homer and Minna ain't took it that way. They took it more like they had been selected out of the whole world as a couple worthy to have a blessed miracle happen to 'em. There might of been single babies born now and then to common folks, but never a case of twins—and twins like these! Marvels of strength and beauty, having to be guarded day and night against colic and kidnappers.

They had 'em down to the post office at Kulanche the other day showing 'em off, each one in a red shawl; and sneering at people with only one. And this imbecile Homer says to me:

"'Of course it can't be hoped,' he says, 'that this great world war will last that long; but if it could last till these boys was in shape to fight I bet it wouldn't last much after that. Yes, sir; little Roosevelt and Pershing would soon put an end to that scrap!'

"And now they're teething and got to have rubber rings. And no, he couldn't send any one down for 'em; and he couldn't order 'em by mail either, because they got to be just the right kind.

"'Poor little Pershing is right feverish with his gums,' says Homer, 'but little Roosevelt has got a front one through already. He bit my thumb yesterday with it—darned near to the bone. He did so!'

"Calls himself a cowman, does he? He might of been—once. Now he ain't no more than a woman's home companion!"

VIII

CAN HAPPEN!

LEW WEE, prized Chinese chef of the Arrowhead Ranch, had butchered, cooked, and served two young roosters for the evening meal with a finesse that cried for tribute. As he replaced the evening lamp on the cleared table in the big living room he listened to my fulsome praise of his artistry as Marshal Foch might hear me say that I considered him a rather good strategist. Lew Wee heard but gave no sign, as one set above the petty adulation of compelled worshipers. Yet I knew his secret soul made festival of my words and would have been hurt by their withholding. This is his way. Not the least furtive lightening of his subtle eyes hinted that I had pleased him.

He presently withdrew to his tiny room off the kitchen, where, as was his evening custom for half an hour, he coaxed an amazing number of squealing or whining notes from his two-stringed fiddle. I pictured him as he played. He would be seated in his wicker armchair beside a little table on which a lamp glowed, the room tightly closed, window down, door shut, a fast-burning brown-paper cigarette to make the atmosphere more noxious. After many more of the cigarettes had made it all but impossible, Lew Wee, with the lamp brightly burning, as it would burn the night through—for devils of an injurious sort and in great numbers will fearlessly enter a dark room—he would lie down to refreshing sleep. That fantasy of ventilation! Lew Wee always

sleeps in an air-tight room packed with cigarette smoke, and a lamp turned high at his couchside; and Lew Wee is hardy.

He played over and over now a plaintive little air of minors that put a gentle appeal through two closed doors. It is one he plays a great deal. He has told me its meaning. He says—speaking with a not unpleasant condescension—that this little tune will mean: "Life comes like a bird-song through the open windows of the heart." It sounds quite like that and is a very satisfying little song, with no beginning or end.

He played it now, over and over, wanderingly and at leisure, and I pictured his rapt face above the whining fiddle; the face, say, of the Philosopher Mang, sage of the second degree and disciple of Confucius, who was lifted from earth by the gods in a time we call B. C. but which was then thought to be a fresh, new, late time; the face of subtle eyes and guarded dignity. And I wondered, as I had often wondered, whether Lew Wee, lone alien in the abiding place of mad folks, did not suffer a vast homesickness for his sane kith, who do not misspend their days building up certain grotesque animals to slaughter them for a dubious food. True, he had the compensation of believing invincibly that the Arrowhead Ranch and all its concerns lay upon his own slightly bowed shoulders; that the thing would fast crumble upon his severance from it. But I questioned whether this were adequate. I felt him to be a man of sorrow if not of tragedy. Vaguely he reached me as one who had survived some colossal buffeting.

As I mused upon this Ma Pettengill sorted the evening mail and to Lew Wee she now took his San Francisco newspaper, *Young China*, and a letter. Half an hour later Lew Wee brought wood to replenish the fire. He disposed of this and absently brushed the hearth with

a turkey wing. Then he straightened the rug, crossed the room, and straightened on the farther wall a framed portrait in colour of Majestic Folly, a prize bull of the Hereford strain. Then he drew a curtain, flicked dust from a corner of the table, and made a slow way to the kitchen door, pausing to alter slightly the angle of a chair against the wall.

Ma Pettengill, at the table, was far in the Red Gap *Recorder* for the previous day. I was unoccupied and I watched Lew Wee. He was doing something human; he was lingering for a purpose. He straightened another chair and wiped dust from the gilt frame of another picture, Architect's Drawing of the Pettengill Block, Corner Fourth and Main streets, Red Gap, Washington. From this feat he went softly to the kitchen door, where he looked back; hung waiting in the silence. He had made no sound, yet he had conveyed to his employer a wish for speech. She looked up at him from the lamp's glow, chin down, brows raised, and eyes inquiring of him over shining nose glasses.

"My Uncle's store, Hankow, burn' down," said Lew Wee.

"Why, wasn't that too bad!" said Ma Pettengill.

"Can happen!" said Lew Wee positively.

"Too bad!" said Ma Pettengill again.

"I send him nine hundred dollars your money. Money burn, too," said Lew Wee.

"Now, now! Well, that certainly is too bad! What a shame!"

"Can happen!" affirmed Lew Wee.

It was colourless. He was not treating his loss lightly nor yet was he bewailing it.

"You put your money in the bank next time," warned his employer sharply, "instead of letting it lie

round in some flimsy Chinee junk shop. They're always burning."

Lew Wee regarded her with a stilled face.

"Can happen!" he again murmured.

He was the least bit insistent, as if she could not yet have heard this utterly sufficing truth. Then he was out; and a moment later the two-stringed fiddle whined a little song through two closed doors.

I said something acute and original about the ingrained fatalism of the Oriental races.

Ma Pettengill laid down her paper, put aside her glasses, and said, yes, Chinee one fatal race; feeling fatal thataway was what made 'em such good help. Because why? Because, going to work at such-and-such a place, this here fatal feeling made 'em think one place was no worse than another; so why not stick here? If other races felt as fatal as the Chinee race it would make a grand difference in the help problem. She'd bet a million dollars right now that a lot of people wished the Swedes and Irish had fatal feelings like that.

I said Lew Wee had the look of one ever expecting the worst; even more than the average of his race.

"It ain't that," said my hostess. "He don't expect anything at all; or mebbe everything. He takes what comes. If it's good or bad, he says, 'Can happen!' in the same tone of voice; and that ends it. There he is now, knowing that all this good money he saved by hard labour has gone up in smoke, and paying the loss no more attention that if he'd merely broke a string on that squeaky long-necked contraption he saws."

"He seems careless enough with his money, certainly."

"Sure, because he don't believe it does the least good to be careful."

From a cloth sack the speaker poured tobacco into a

longitudinally creased brown paper and adeptly fashioned something in the nature of a cigarette.

"Ain't I been telling him for a year to buy Liberty Bonds with his money? He did buy two, being very pro-American on account of once having a violent difference with a German; and he's impressed with the button the Government lets him wear for it. He feels like the President has made him a mandarin or something; but if the whole Government went flooey to-morrow he'd just say, 'Can happen!' and pick up his funny fiddle. Of course it ain't human, but it helps to keep help. I had him six years now, and the only thing that can't happen is his leaving. I don't say there wasn't reasons why he first took the place."

Reasons? So there had been reasons in the life of Lew Wee. I had suspected as much. I found something guarded and timid and long-suffering in his demeanour. He bore, I thought, the searing memory of an ordeal.

"Reasons!" I said, waiting.

"Reasons for coming this far in the first place. Wanted to save his life. I don't know why, with that fatal idea he sticks to. Habit, probably. Anyway, he had trouble saving it—kind of a feverish week."

She lighted the cigarette and chuckled hoarsely between the first relishing whiffs of it.

"Yes, sir; that poor boy believes the country between here and the coast is inhabited by savages; wild hill tribes that try to exterminate peaceful travellers; a low kind of outlaws that can't understand a word you tell 'em and act violent if you try to say it over. And having got here, past the demons, I figure he's afraid to go back. I don't blame him."

Ordinarily, this would have been enough. Now the lady merely smoked and chuckled. When I again

uttered "Well?" with a tinge of rebuke, she came down from her musing, but into another and distant field. It was the field of natural history, of zoology, of vertebrates, mammals, furred quadrupeds—or, in short, skunks. One may as well be blunt in this matter.

Ma Pettengill said the skunk got too little credit for its lovely character, it being the friendliest wild animal known to man and never offensive except when put upon. Wasn't we all offensive at those times? And just because the skunk happened to be superbly gifted in this respect, was that any reason to ostracize him?

"I ain't sayin' I'd like to mix with one when he's vexed," continued the lady judicially; "but why vex 'em? They never look for trouble; then why force it on their notice? Take one summer, years ago, when Lysander John and I had a camp up above Dry Forks. My lands! Every night after supper the prettiest gang of skunks would frolic down off the hillside and romp round us. Here would come Pa and Ma in the lead, and mebbe a couple of aunts and uncles and four or five of the cunningest little ones, and they'd all snoop fearlessly round the cook fire and the grub boxes, picking up scraps of food—right round under my feet, mind you—and looking up now and then and saying, 'Thank you!' plain as anything, and what lovely weather we're having, and why don't you come up and see us some time?—and so on. They kept it up for a month while we was there; and I couldn't want neater, nicer neighbours.

"Lysander John, he used to get some nervous, especially after one chased him back into the tent late one night; but it was only wanting to play like a mere puppy, I tells him. He'd heard a noise and rushed out, and there the little thing was kind of waltzing in the moonlight, whirling round and round and having a splendid

time. When it came bounding toward him—I guess that was the only time in his life Lysander John was scared helpless. He busted back into the tent a mere palsied wreck of his former self; but the cute little minx just come up and sniffed at the flap in a friendly way, like it wanted to reassure him. I wanted him to go out and play with it in the moonlight. He wouldn't. I liked 'em round the place, they was so neighbourly and calm. Of course if I'd ever stepped on one, or acted sudden——

"They also tame easy and make affectionate pets. Ralph Waldo Gusted, over on Elkhorn, that traps 'em in winter to make First-Quality Labrador Sealskin cloaks—his children got two in the house they play with like kittens; and he says himself the skunk has been talked about in a loose and unthinking way. He says a pet skunk is not only a fine mouser but leads a far more righteous life than a cat, which is given to debauchery and cursing in the night. Yes, sir; they're the most trusting and friendly critters in all the woods if not imposed upon—after that, to be sure!"

I said yes, yes, and undoubtedly, and all very interesting, and well and good in its place; but, really, was this its place? I wanted Lew Wee's reasons for believing in the existence of savage hill tribes between there and San Francisco.

"Yes; and San Francisco is worse," said the lady. "He believes that city to be ready for mob violence at any moment. Wild crowds get together and yell and surge round on the least provocation. He says it's different in China, the people there not being crazy."

"Well, then, we can get on with this mystery."

So Ma Pettengill said we could; and we did indeed.

This here chink seems to of been a carefree child up

to the time the civilized world went crazy with a version for him. He was a good cook and had a good job at a swell country club down the peninsula from San Francisco. The hours was easy and he was close enough to the city to get in once or twice a week and mingle with his kind. He could pass an evening with the older set, playing fan-tan and electing a new president of the Chinee race, or go to the Chinee theatre and set in a box and chew sugar cane; or he could have a nice time at the clubrooms of the Young China Progressive Association, playing poker for money. Once in a while he'd mix in a tong war, he being well thought of as a hatchet man—only they don't use hatchets, but automatics; in fact, all Nature seemed to smile on him.

Well, right near this country club one of his six hundred thousand cousins worked as gardener for a man, and this man kept many beautiful chickens—so Lew Wee says. And he says a strange and wicked night animal crept into the home of these beautiful birds and slew about a dozen of 'em by biting 'em under their wings. The man told his cousin that the wicked night animal must be a skunk and that his cousin should catch him in a trap. So the cousin told Lew Wee that the wicked night animal was a skunk and that he was going to catch him in a trap. Lew Wee thought it was interesting.

He went up to the city and in the course of a pleasant evening at fan-tan he told about the slain chickens that were so beautiful, and how the night animal that done it would be caught in a trap. A great friend of Lew Wee's was present, a wonderful doctor. Lew Wee still says he is the most wonderful doctor in the world, knowing things about medicines that the white doctors can't ever find out, these being things that the Chinee doctors found out over fifteen thousand years ago, and

therefore true. The doctor's name was Doctor Hong Foy, and he was a rich doctor. And he says to Lew Wee that he needs a skunk for medicine, and if any one will bring him a live skunk in good condition he will pay twenty-five dollars in American money for same.

Lew Wee says he won't be needing that skunk much longer—or words to that effect—because he will get this one from the trap. Doctor Hong Foy is much pleased and says the twenty-five American dollars is eager to become Lew Wee's for this animal, alive and in good condition.

Lew Wee goes back, and the next day his cousin says he set a trap and the night skunk entered it, but he was strong like a lion and had busted out and bit some more chickens under the wing, and then went away from there. He showed Lew Wee the trap and Lew Wee seen it wasn't the right kind, but he knows how to make the right kind and will do so if the skunk can become entirely his property when caught.

The cousin, without the least argument, agreed heartily to this. He was honest enough. He explained carefully that the skunk was wished to be caught to keep it from biting chickens under the wing, causing them to die, and not for any value whatever it might have to the person catching it. He says it will be beneficial to catch the skunk, but not to keep it; that a skunk is not nice after being caught, and Lew Wee is more than welcome to it if he will make a right trap. The cousin himself was probably one of these fatal "Can happen!" boys. When Lew Wee says he must have the skunk alive and in good condition he just looked at him in a distant manner that Lew Wee afterward remembered; but he only said: "Oh, very well!" in his native language.

Lew Wee then found a small peaked-roofed chicken coop, with stout slats on it, and made a figure-four trap, and put something for bait on the pointed stick and set the trap, and begun right off to squander twenty-five dollars that was to come as easy as picking it up in the road.

There wasn't any breakfast trade at the country club and Lew Wee was able to get over across the golf links to the chicken place early the next morning. The cousin was some distance from the chicken place, hoeing a bed of artichokes, but he told Lew Wee his trap had been a very wonderful trap and the night animal was safe caught. Lew Wee was surprised at his cousin's indifference and thought he should of been over there looking at the prize. But not so. The cousin was keeping some distance off. He just told Lew Wee that there was his animal and that he should take it away with as little disturbance as possible, which would be better far and near for all concerned. He was strangely cool about it.

But Lew Wee was full of pleasant excitement and run swiftly to his trap. Sure enough ! There was a nice big beautiful skunk in his trap. Lew Wee had never seen one. He said it was more beautiful than a golden pheasant, with rich, shiny black fur and a lovely white stripe starting from its face and running straight down on each side of its back; and it had a wonderful waving tail, like a plume. He looked at it joyfully through the slats. It was setting down comfortably when he come up; so he spoke to it in a friendly way. Then it got up and yawned and stretched itself, looking entirely self-possessed, but kind of bored, I suppose, like this was a poor sort of practical joke to play on a gentleman; so now would someone kindly lift this box off him?

The proud owner danced about it in great glee and

told it how the nice doctor wouldn't hurt it any, but would give it a good home, with chicken for supper, mebbe, and so on. Then he went back to his cousin and give him a pack of cigarettes, out of his overflowing heart, and asked where was something he could put his wild animal in and take it to town to his great friend Doctor Hong Foy, who had a desire for it.

The cousin took the cigarettes, but he looked at Lew Wee a long time, like he didn't understand Chinee at all. Lew Wee said it all over again. He wanted something to take the wild animal to town in, because the chicken coop it was now in hadn't any bottom; and was too big, anyway.

The cousin again looked at him a long time, like one in a trance. Then, without any silly talk, he went over to the barn and handed Lew Wee a bran sack.

Lew Wee said that was just the thing; and would the cousin come over and help him in case the animal would be timid and not want to go in the sack? The cousin said he would not. And he didn't go back to the artichokes. He went to a bed of cauliflower clear at the other end of the garden, after giving Lew Wee another of them long "Can happen!" looks, which signify that we live in a strange and terrible world.

Lew Wee went back alone to his prize, finding it still calm, like a gentleman in his club. He reassured it with some more cheerful words. He had a thought right then, he says; kind of a sudden fear. He had been told the first day by his cousin, and also by his great friend Doctor Hong Foy, that the skunk gave out a strong scent disagreeable to many people. But this one he'd caught didn't have any scent of any kind. So mebbe that meant it wasn't in good condition and Doctor Hong Foy wouldn't wish it for twenty-five dollars. However, it was sure a skunk, and looked strong and healthy and

worth taking in to the doctor, who could then tell about its condition.

Lew Wee opened the neck of the bag, laid it on the ground close by him, got down on his knees, and carefully raised one side of the coop. The wild animal looked more beautiful than ever; and it didn't seem alarmed, but just the tiniest mite suspicious. It must of looked like it was saying it was entirely willing to be friendly, but you couldn't ever tell about these Chinamen. Lew Wee reached a hand slowly over toward it and it moved against the back of the coop, very watchful. Then Lew Wee made a quick grab and caught the back of its neck neatly.

Of course this showed at once that a Chinaman wasn't to be trusted, and Lew Wee says it put up a fierce fight, being so quick and muscular as to surprise him. He was fully engaged for at least thirty seconds; the animal clawed and squirmed and twisted, and it bit in the clinches and almost got away. He was breathing hard when he finally got his wild animal into the sack and the neck tied.

He says he didn't actually realize until then, what with all the excitement, that something had gone kind of wrong. He was not only breathing hard but it was hard breathing. He says he felt awful good at that moment. He had been afraid his animal might not be in good condition, but it undoubtedly was. He thought right off that if one in just ordinary good condition was worth twenty-five dollars to Doctor Hong Foy, then this one might be worth as much as thirty-five, or even forty. He thought it must be the best wild animal of that kind in the world.

So he picked up the sack, with his prize squirming and swearing inside, and threw it over his shoulder and started back to the country club. He stopped a minute

to thank his cousin once more; but his cousin seen him coming and run swiftly off in a strange manner, as if not wishing to be thanked again. Then Lew Wee went on across a field and over the golf links. His idea was to take the little animal to his room in the clubhouse and keep it there until night, when he could take it into town and get all that money for it. He was quite happy and wished he hadn't scared the poor thing so.

He thought when he got to his room he might let it out of the sack to play round there in freedom during the day. He spent the twenty-five dollars for different things on the way over the golf links. He told me he knew perfectly well that his pet would be likely to attract notice; but he didn't realize how much. A Chinese is a wonder. He can very soon get used to anything.

But Lew Wee never did get to his room again. When he got up near the clubhouse some fine people were getting out of a shiny purple motor car as big as a palace, and they had golf sticks in bags. One of 'em was a big red-faced man with a fierce gray moustache, and this man begun to yell at Lew Wee in a remarkable manner. The words being in a foreign language, he couldn't make 'em out well, but the sense of it was that the big man wanted him to go away from there. Lew Wee knew he wasn't working for this man, who was only a club member; so he paid no attention to him beyond waving his hand friendly, and went on round toward the back entrance.

Then out of the side entrance come the chief steward, also yelling, and this was the man he was working for; so he stopped to listen. It wasn't for long. He lost a good job as cook in no time at all. Of course that never bothers a Chinee any; but when he started in to get his things from his room the steward picked up a golf club

with an iron end and threatened to hurt him, and some of the kitchen help run round from the back with knives flashing, and the big red-faced man was yelling to the steward to send for a policeman, and some ladies that had got out of another big car had run halfway across the golf links, as if pursued by something, and more people from the inside come to the door and yelled at him and made motions he should go away; so he thought he better not try to get his things just then. He couldn't see why all the turmoil, even if he had got something in prime condition for his friend Doctor Hong Foy.

It was noticeable, he thought; but nothing to make all this fuss about, especially if the fools would just let him get it to his own room, where it could become quiet again, like when he had first seen it in the trap. But he saw they wasn't going to let him, and the big man had gone in the front way and was now shaking both fists at him through a side window that was closed; so he thought, all right, he'd leave 'em flat, without a cook—and a golf tournament was on that day, too! He was twenty-five dollars to the good and he could easy get another job.

So he waved good-bye to all of 'em and went down the road half a mile to the car line. He was building air castles by that time. He says it occurred to him that Doctor Hong Foy might like many of these wild animals, at twenty-five dollars each; and he might take up the work steady. It was exciting and sporty, and would make him suddenly rich. Mebbe it wasn't as pleasant work as his cousin did, spending his time round gardens and greenhouses; but it was more adventurous. He really liked it, and he would get even more used to it in time so he wouldn't hardly notice it at all. As he stood there waiting for a trolley car he must of thought up a whole headful of things he'd buy with all these

sudden emoluments. Several motor cars passed while he waited and he noticed that folks in 'em all turned to look at him in an excited way. But he knew all Americans was crazy and liable to be mad about something.

Pretty soon a car stopped and some people got off the front end. They stopped short and begun to look all round 'em in a frightened manner—two ladies and a child and an old man. The conductor also stepped off and looked round in a frightened manner; but he jumped back on the car quick. Lew Wee then hopped on to the back platform, with his baggage, just as it started on. It started quick and was going forty miles an hour by the time he'd got the door open. The two women in the car screamed at him like maniacs, and before he'd got comfortably set down the conductor had opened the front door and started for him. He got halfway down the car; then he started back and made a long speech at him from the front end, while the car stopped like it had hit a mountain, throwing everyone off their seats.

Lew Wee gathered that he was being directed to get off the car quickly. The other passengers had crowded back by the conductor and was telling him the same thing. One old gentleman with a cane, who mebbe couldn't walk good, had took up his cane and busted a window quick and had his head outside. Lew Wee thought he was an anarchist, busting up property that way. Also the motorman, who had stopped the car so soon, was now shaking a brass weapon at him over the heads of the others. So he thought he might as well get off the car and save all this talk. He'd got his fare out, but he put it back in his pocket and picked up his sack and went out in a very dignified way, even if they was threatening him. He knew he had something

worth twenty-five dollars in his sack, and they probably didn't know it or they wouldn't act that way.

He set down and waited for another car, still spending his money.

The next one slowed down for him; but all at once it started up again more swift than the wind, he says; and he could see that the motorman was a coward about something, because he looked greatly frightened when he flew by the spot. He never saw one go so fast as this one did after it had slowed up for him. It looked like the motorman would soon be arrested for driving his car too fast. He then had the same trouble with another car; it slowed up, but was off again before it stopped, and the people in it looked out at him kind of horrified.

It begun to look like he wasn't going to ride to the city in a trolley car. Pretty soon along the road come a Japanese man he knew. His name was Suzuki Katsuzo; and Lew Wee says that, though nothing but a Japanese, he is in many respects a decent man. Suzuki passed him, going round in a wide circle, and stopped to give him some good advice. He refused to come a step nearer, even after Lew Wee told him that what he had in the sack was worth a lot of money.

Suzuki was very polite, but he didn't want to come any nearer, even after that. He told Lew Wee he was almost certain they didn't want him on street cars with it, no matter if it was worth thousands of dollars. It might be worth that much, and very likely was if the price depended on its condition. But the best and most peaceful way for Lew Wee was to find a motor car going that way and ask the gentleman driving it to let him ride; he said it would be better, too, to pick out a motor car without a top to it, because the other kind are often shut up too tightly for such affairs as this, like street

cars. He said the persons in street cars are common persons, and do not care if a thing is worth thousands of dollars or not if they don't like to have it in the car with them. He didn't believe it would make any difference to them if something like this was worth a million dollars in American gold.

So Lew Wee thanked Suzuki Katsuzo, who went quickly on his way; and then he tried to stop a few motor cars. It seemed like they was as timid as street cars. People would slow up when they seen him in the road and then step on the gas like it was a matter of life and death. Lew Wee must of said "Can happen!" a number of times that morning.

Finally, along come a German. He was driving a big motor truck full of empty beer kegs, and Lew Wee says the German himself was a drinking man and had been drinking so much beer that he could nearly go to sleep while driving the car.

He slowed up and stopped when he saw Lew Wee in the middle of the road. Lew Wee said he wanted to go to San Francisco and would give the driver a dollar to let him ride back on the beer kegs. The driver said: "Let's see the dollar." And took it and said: "All right, John; get up." Then he sniffed the air several times and said it seemed like there had been a skunk round. Lew Wee didn't tell him he had it in his bag because the driver might know how much it was worth and try foul play on him to get possession of it. So they started on, and the German, who had been drinking, settled into a kind of doze at the wheel.

Lew Wee was up on the beer kegs and enjoying himself like a rich gentleman riding to the city in his motor car. It was kind of nice, in spite of being used to his pet, to be going through the air so fast.

The German seemed to be getting sobered up by

something, and after about five or six miles he stopped the car and yelled to Lew Wee that a skunk had been round this place, too; and mebbe he had run over one. Lew Wee looked noncommittal; but the German was getting more wakeful every minute, and after a couple more miles he pulled up again and come round to where Lew Wee was. He says it seems like a skunk has been round everywhere; and, in fact, it seems to be right here now. He sees the sack and wants to know what's in it. But he don't give Lew Wee a chance to lie about it. He was thoroughly awake now and talked quite sober but bitterly. He ordered Lew Wee to get off of there quickly. Lew Wee says he swore at him a lot. He thinks it was in German. He ain't sure of the language, but he knows it was swearing.

He wasn't going to get off, at first; but the German got a big stick from the roadside and started for him, so he climbed down the other side and started to run. But the cowardly German didn't chase him a single step. He got back in his seat and started down the road quicker than it looked like his truck had been able to travel.

Anyway, Lew Wee was a lot nearer to town, owing to the German not having been sensitive at first; and if worst come to worst he could walk. It looked like he'd have to. Then he saw he'd have to walk, anyway, because this brutal German that put him off the truck hadn't give him back his dollar, and that was all he had. He now put the First High Curse of the One Hundred and Nine Malignant Devils on all Germans. It is a grand curse, he says, and has done a lot of good in China. He was uncertain whether it would work away from home; but he says it did. Every time he gets hold of a paper now he looks for the place where Germans in close formation is getting mowed down by machine-gun fire.

But his money was gone miles away from him by this time; so he started his ten-mile walk. I don't know. It's always been a mystery to me how he could do it. He could get kind of used to it himself, and mebbe he thought the public could do as much. It was an interesting walk he had.

At first, he thought he was only attracting the notice of the vulgar, like when some American ruffians doing a job of repair work on the road threw rocks at him when he stopped to rest a bit. But he soon noticed that rich ladies and gentlemen also seemed to shun him as he passed through little towns. He carried his impetuous burden on a stick over his shoulder and at a distance seemed to be an honest workman; but people coming closer didn't look respectfully at him, by any means. It seemed as if some odium was attached to him.

Once he stopped to pick a big red rose from a bush that hung over the wall in front of a pretty place, and a beautiful child dressed like a little princess stood there; and, being fond of children, like all Chinee men, he spoke to her; but a nurse screamed and run out at him and yelled something in another foreign language. He thinks it was swearing, same as the German, though she looked like a lady. So he went sadly on, smelling of his lovely rose from time to time.

The only way I can figure out how he got through them suburbs is that parties wanted to have him arrested or shot, or something, but wouldn't let him stick round long enough to get it done; they was in two minds about him, I guess: they wished to detain him, but also wished harder to have him away.

So he went on uninjured, meeting murderous looks and leaving excitement in his trail; hearing men threaten him even while they run away from him. It hurt him

to be shunned this way—him that had always felt so friendly toward one and all. He couldn't deny it by this time: people was shunning him on account of what Doctor Hong Foy wanted alive and in good condition.

As he worked his way into the city the excitement mounted higher. He took to the middle of the street where he could. Mobs collected behind him and waved things at him and looked like they would lynch him; but they didn't come close enough for that. It seemed like he bore a charmed life in spite of this hostility. When he'd got well into the city a policeman did come up and start to arrest him, but thought better of it and went round a corner. It made him feel like a social cull or an outcast, or something.

He wasn't a bit foolish about his cunning little pet by this time. And it looked as if these crowds of people that gathered behind him would finally get their nerve up to do something with him. They was getting bigger and acting more desperate. When he was on the sidewalk he swept people off into the road like magic, and when he was in the street they would edge close in to the buildings.

It really hurt him. He'd always liked Americans, in spite of their foreign ways, and they had seemed to like him; but now all at once they was looking on him as a yellow peril. He still kept his rose to smell of. He said it was a sweet comfort to him at a time when the whole world had turned against him for nothing at all.

He made for Chinatown by the quietest streets he could pick out, though even on them hardly escaping the lawless mob. But at last he got to the street where Doctor Hong Foy's office was. It was largely a Chinese street and lots of his friends lived there; but even now, when you'd think he'd get kind words and congratulations, he didn't.

His best friends regarded him as one better let alone and made swift gestures of repulsion when he passed 'em. Quite a crowd followed at a safe distance and gathered outside when he went into Doctor Hong Foy's office. It was a kind of store on the ground floor, so Lew Wee says, with shelves full of rich old Chinee medicines that had a certain powerful presence of their own. But even in here Doctor Hong Foy should of known beyond a doubt what his friend had brought him.

It seemed the doctor had to make sure. He wasn't of the same believing nature as the street-car people, and the German and others. He wanted to be shown. So they undone the sack and opened it down to where Doctor Hong Foy could make sure. But their work was faulty and the wild animal didn't like handling after its day of mistreatment. It had been made morbid, I guess. Anyway, it displayed an extremely nervous tendency, and many impetuous movements, and bit Doctor Hong Foy in the thumb. Then the first owner tried to grab him and the pet wriggled away on to a tray of dried eel gizzards, or something, and off that to the open door.

The little thing run into the front of the large crowd that had waited outside and had a wonderful effect on it. Them in the centre tried to melt away, but couldn't on account of them on the outside; so there was fights and accidents, and different ones tromped on, and screams of fear. And this brought a lot bigger crowd that pressed in and made the centre ones more anguished. I don't know. That poor animal had been imposed on all day and must of been overwrought. It was sore vexed by now and didn't care who knew it. Lots of 'em did.

Of course Lew Wee dashed out after his property, hugging the sack to his chest; and, of course, he created

just as much disturbance as his little pet had. Policemen was mingling with the violence by this time and adding much to its spirit. One public-spirited citizen grabbed Lew Wee in spite of its being distasteful; but he kicked the poor man on the kneecap and made a way through the crowd without too much trouble.

He wasn't having any vogue whatever in that neighbourhood. He run down a little side street, up an alley, and into a cellar he knew about, this cellar being the way out of the Young China Progressive Association when they was raided up the front stairs on account of gambling at poker.

He could hear the roar of the mob clear from there. It took about an hour for this to die down. People would come to see what all the excitement was about, and find out almost at once; then they'd try to get away, and run against others coming to find out, thus producing a very earnest riot. There was mounted policemen and patrol wagons and many arrests, and an armed posse hunting for the escaped pet and shooting up alleys at every little thing that moved. They never did find the pet—so one of Lew Wee's cousins wrote him; which made him sorry on account of Doctor Hong Foy and the twenty-five or mebbe thirty dollars.

He lay hid in this cellar till dark; then started out to find his friends and get something to eat. He darned near started everything all over again; but he dodged down another alley and managed to get some noodles and chowmain at the back door of the Hong-Kong Grill, where a tong brother worked. He begun to realize that he was a marked man. The mark didn't show; but he was. He didn't know what the law might do to him. It looked like at least twenty years in some penal institution, if not hanging; and he didn't want either one.

So he borrowed three dollars from the tong brother and started for some place where he could lead a quiet life. He managed to get to Oakland, though the deck hands on the ferryboat talked about throwing him overboard. But they let him live if he would stay at the back end till everyone, including the deck hands, was safe off or behind something when the boat landed. Then he wandered off into the night and found a freight train. He didn't care where he went—just somewhere they wouldn't know about his crime.

He rode a while between two freight cars; then left that train and found a blind baggage on a passenger train that went faster and near froze him to death. He got off, chilled in the early morning, at some little town and bought some food in a Chinee restaurant and also got warm. But he hadn't no more than got warm when he was put out of the place, right by his own people.

It was warm outside by this time, so he didn't mind it so much. The town did, though. It must of been a small town, but he says thousands of men chased him out of it about as soon as he was warmed up enough to run. He couldn't understand this, because how could they know he was the one that caused all that trouble in San Francisco?

He got a freight train outside the town and rode on and on. He says he rode on for weeks and weeks; but that's his imagination. It must of been about three days, with spells of getting off for food and to get warmed when he was freezing, and be chased by these wild hill tribes when he had done the latter. It put a crimp into his sunny nature—all this armed pursuit of him. He says if he had been a Christian, and believed in only one God, he would never of come through alive, it taking about seventy-four or five of his own gods to

protect him from these maddened savages. He had a continuous nightmare of harsh words and blows. He wondered they didn't put him in jail; but it seemed like they only wanted to keep him going.

Of course it had to end. He got to Spokane finally and sneaked round to a friend that had a laundry; and this friend must of been a noble soul. He took in the outcast and nursed him with food and drink, and repeatedly washed his clothes. Wanting a ranch cook about that time, I got in touch with him through another cousin, who said this man wanted very much to go out into a safe country, and would never leave it because of unpleasantness in getting here.

It was ten days after he got there that I saw him first, and I'll be darned if he was any human sachet, even then. But after hearing his story I knew that time would once more make him fit for human association. He told me his story with much feeling this time and he told it to me about once a week for three months after he got here—pieces of it at a time. It used to cheer me a lot. He was always remembering something new. He said he liked the great silence and peace of this spot.

You couldn't tell him to this day that his belief about the savage hill tribes ain't sound. He believes anything "can happen" in that country down there. Doctor Hong Foy never paid him the twenty-five, of course, though admitting that he would of done so if the animal had not escaped, because he was in such good condition, for a skunk, that he was worth twenty-five dollars of any doctor's money. I don't know. As I say, they're friendly little critters; but it's more money that I would actually pay for one.

Through two closed doors the whine of the fiddle still penetrated. Perhaps Lew Wee's recent loss had moved

him to play later than was his custom, pondering upon the curious whims that stir the gods when they start to make things happen. But he was still no cynic. Over and over he played the little air which means: "Life comes like a bird-song through the open windows of the heart."

IX

THE TAKER-UP

ON A tired evening, in front of the Arrowhead's open fire, I lived over for the hundredth time a great moment. From the big pool under the falls four miles up the creek I had landed the Big Trout. Others had failed in years past; I, too, had failed more than once. But to-day !

At the hour of 9:46 A. M., to be exact, as one should in these matters, I had cast three times above the known lair of this fish. Then I cast a fourth time, more from habit than hope; and the fight was on. I put it here with the grim brevity of a communique. Despite stout resistance, the objective was gained at 9:55 A. M. And the Big Trout would weigh a good two and one half—say three or three and one quarter—pounds. These are the bare facts.

Verily it was a moment to live over; and to myself now I was more discursive. I vanquished the giant trout again and again, altering details of the contest at will—as when I waded into icy water to the waist in a last moment of panic. My calm review disclosed that this had been fanciful overcaution; but at the great crisis and for three minutes afterward I had gloried in the wetting.

Now again I three times idly flicked that corner of the pool with a synthetic moth. Again for the fourth time I cast, more from habit than hope. Then ensued that terrific rush from the pool's lucent depths——

"Yes, sir; you wouldn't need no two guesses for what she'd wear at a grand costume ball of the Allied nations —not if you knew her like I do." This was Ma Pettengill, who had stripped a Sunday paper from the great city to its society page. She lifted this under the lamp and made strange but eloquent noises of derision:

"You take Genevieve May now, of a morning, before that strong-arm Japanese maid has got her face rubbed down and calked with paints, oils, and putty, and you'd say to her, as a friend and well-wisher: 'Now look here, old girl, you might get by at that costume ball as Stricken Serbia or Ravaged Belgium, but you better take a well-meant hint and everlastingly do not try to get over as La Belle France. True, France has had a lot of things done to her,' you'd say, 'and she may show a blemish here and there; but still, don't try it unless you wish to start something with a now friendly ally—even if it is in your own house. That nation is already pushed to a desperate point, and any little thing might prove too much—even if you are Mrs. Genevieve May Popper and have took up the war in a hearty girlish manner.' Yes, sir!"

This, to be sure, was outrageous—that I should hear myself addressing a strange lady in terms so gross. Besides, I wished again to be present at the death of my favourite trout. I affected not to have heard. I affected to be thinking deeply.

It worked, measurably. Once more I scanned the pool's gleaming surface and felt the cold pricking of spray from the white water that tumbled from a cleft in the rocks above. Once more I wondered if this, by chance, might prove a sad but glorious day for a long-elusive trout. Once more I looked to the fly. Once more I——

"What I never been able to figger out—how can a

dame like that fool herself beyond a certain age? Seams in her face! And not a soul but would know she got her hair like the United States acquired Louisiana. That lady's power of belief is enormous. And I bet she couldn't put two and two together without making a total wreck of the problem. Like fair time a year ago, when she was down to Red Gap taking up the war. She comes along Fourth Street in her uniform one morning, fresh from the hands of this hired accomplice of hers, and meets Cousin Egbert Floud and me where we'd stopped to talk a minute. She is bubbling with war activity as usual, but stopped and bubbled at us a bit—kind of hale and girlish, you might say. We passed the time of day; and, being that I'm a first-class society liar, I say how young and fresh she looks; and she gets the ball and bats it right back to Cousin Egbert.

"'You'd never dream,' says she, 'what my funny little mite of a Japanese maid calls me! You'd really never guess! She calls me Madam Peach Blossom! Isn't that perfectly absurd, Mr. Floud?'

"And poor Cousin Egbert, instead of giggling in a hearty manner and saying 'Oh, come now, Mrs. Popper! What's in the least absurd about that?'—like he was meant to and like any gentleman would of—what does the poor silly do but blink at her a couple of times like an old barn owl that's been startled and say 'Yes, ma'am!'—flat and cold, just like that!

"It almost made an awkward pause; but the lady pretended she had been saying something to me, so she couldn't hear him. That Cousin Egbert! He certainly wouldn't ever get very high in the diplomatic service of anybody's country.

"And here's this grand ball of the Allied nations in costume, give in Genevieve May's palatial residence. It must of throwed a new panic into Berlin when they

got the news off the wire. Matter of fact, I don't see how them Germans held out long as they did, with Genevieve May Popper putting crimps into 'em with her tireless war activities. That proves itself they'd been long preparing for the fray. Of course, with Genevieve May and this here new city marshal, Fotch, the French got, it was only a question of time. Genevieve is sure one born taker-up! Now she's made a complete circle of the useful arts and got round to dancing again. Yes, sir!"

I affected to believe I was solitary in the room. This time it did not work—even measurably. Almost at once came: "I said she was the darndest woman in the world to take things up!" The tone compelled notice, so I said "Indeed!" and "You don't say!" with a cautiously extended space between them, and tried to go on thinking.

Then I knew the woman's full habit of speech was strong upon her and that one might no longer muse upon a caught trout—even one to weigh well up toward four pounds. So I remembered that I was supposed to be a gentleman.

"Go right ahead and talk," I murmured.

"Sure!" said the lady, not murmuring. "What in time did you think I was going to do?"

Yes, sir; I bet she's the greatest taker-up—bar none—the war has yet produced. She's took up France the latest. I understand they got a society of real workers somewhere that's trying to house and feed and give medicine and crutches to them poor unfortunates that got in the way of the dear old Fatherland when it took the lid off its Culture and tried to make the world safe—even for Germans; but I guess this here society gets things over to devastated France without much music

or flourishes or uniforms that would interest Genevieve May.

But if that country is to be saved by costume balls of the Allied nations, with Genevieve May being La Belle France in a dress hardly long enough to show three colours, then it needn't have another uneasy moment. Genevieve stands ready to do all if she can wear a costume and dance the steps it cost her eight dollars a lesson to learn from one of these slim professionals that looks like a rich college boy.

It was this reckless dancing she'd took up when I first knew her, though she probably goes back far enough to of took up roller skating when that was sprung on an eager world; and I know she got herself talked about in 1892 for wearing bloomers on a bicycle. But we wasn't really acquainted till folks begun to act too familiar in public, and call it dancing, and pay eight dollars a lesson to learn something any of 'em that was healthy would of known by instinct at a proper time and place. Having lots of money, Genevieve May travelled round to the big towns, learning new steps and always taking with her one of these eight-dollar boys, with his hair done like a seal, to make sure she'd learn every step she saw.

She was systematic, that woman. If she was in Seattle and heard about a new step in San Francisco, she'd be on the train with her instructor in one hour and come back with the new step down pat. She scandalized Red Gap the year she come to visit her married daughter, Lucille Stultz, by introducing many of these new grips and clinches; but of course that soon wore off. Seems like we get used to anything in this world after it's done by well-dressed people a few times.

Then, as I say, these kind-hearted, music-loving Germans, with their strong affection for home life and little ones, started in to shoot the rest of the world up to

German standards, and they hadn't burned more than a dozen towns in Belgium, after shooting the oldest and youngest and sexecuting the women—I suppose sexecution is what you might call it—before Genevieve took up the war herself.

Yes, sir—took it right up; no sooner said than done with her. It was really all over right then. The Germans might just as well of begun four years ago to talk about the anarchistic blood-lust of Woodrow Wilson as to wait until they found out the Almighty knows other languages besides German.

I believe the Red Cross was the first handle by which Genevieve May took up the war. But that costume is too cheap for one that feels she's a born social leader if she could only get someone to follow. She found that young chits of no real social standing, but with a pleasing exterior, could get into a Red Cross uniform costing about two-eighty-five and sell objects of luxury at a bazaar twice as fast as a mature woman of sterling character in the same simple garb.

So Genevieve May saw it had got to be something costing more money and beyond the reach of an element you wouldn't care to entertain in your own drawing room. And next thing I was up to Spokane, and here she is, dashing round the corridors of the hotel in a uniform that never cost a penny under two hundred and fifty, what with its being made by a swell tailor and having shiny boots with silver spurs and a natty tucked cap and a shiny belt that went round the waist and also up over one shoulder, with metal trimming, and so on. She was awful busy, darting hither and yon at the lunch hour, looking prettily worried and like she would wish to avoid being so conspicuous, but was foiled by the stares of the crowd.

Something always seemed to be happening to make

her stand out; like in the restaurant, where, no sooner did she pick out just the right table, after some hesitation, and get nicely seated, than she'd see someone across the room at a far table and have to run over and speak. She spoke to parties at five distant tables that day, getting a scratchy lunch, I should say. One of the tables was mine. We wasn't what you'd call close friends, but she cut a swath clean across a crowded dining room to tell me how well I was looking.

Of course I fell for the uniform and wanted to know what it meant. Well, it meant that she was organizing a corps of girl ambulance drivers from the city's best families. She was a major herself already, and was being saluted by he-officers. She said it was a wonderful work, and how did I think she looked in this, because it was a time calling for everyone's best, and what had I taken up for my bit? I was only raising beef cattle, so I didn't have any answer to that. I felt quite shamed. And Genevieve went back to her own table for another bite of food, bowing tolerantly to most of the people in the room.

I don't know how far she ever got with this girl's ambulance corps beyond her own uniform. She certainly made an imposing ambulance driver herself on the streets of that town. You'd see her big, shiny, light-blue limousine drive up, with two men on the seat and Genevieve, in uniform, would be helped out by one of 'em, and you knew right off you'd love to be a wounded soldier and be drove over shell-torn roads by her own hands.

Anyway, she got mad and left the ambulance service flat, getting into some sort of brawl with an adjutant general or something through wanting to take a mere detail out of his hands that he felt should stay right where it was, he being one of these offensive martinets

and a stickler for red tape, and swollen with petty power. So Genevieve May said.

So she looked round for another way to start a few home fires burning on the other side of the Rhine. I forget what her next strategy was, but you know it was something cute and busy in a well-fitting uniform, and calculated to shorten the conflict if Germany found it out. You know that much.

I remember at one time she was riding in parades when the boys would march down to the station to go off and settle things in their own crude way. I lost track of what she was taking up for a while, but I know she kept on getting new uniforms till she must of had quite a time every morning deciding what she was going to be that day, like the father of the German Crown Prince.

Finally, last spring, it got to be the simple uniform of a waitress. She had figgered out that all the girls then taking the places of men waiters would get called for nurses sooner or later; so why shouldn't prominent society matrons like herself learn how to wait on table, so as to take the girl waiters' places when they went across? Not exactly that; they wouldn't keep on lugging trays forever in this emergency—only till they could teach new girls the trade, when some new ones come along to take the places of them that had met the call of duty.

So Genievieve agitated and wrote letters from the heart out to about two dozen society buds; and then she terrified the owner of the biggest hotel in her home town till he agreed to let 'em come and wait on table every day at lunch.

Genevieve May's uniform of a poor working girl was a simple black dress, with white apron, cuffs, and cap, the whole, as was right, not costing over six or seven dollars,

though her string of matched pearls that cost two hundred thousand sort of raised the average. The other society buds was arrayed similar and looked like so many waitresses. Not in a hotel, mebbe, but in one of these musical shows where no money has been spared.

The lady had a glorious two days ordering these girls round as head waiter and seeing that everybody got a good square look at her, and so on. But the other girls got tired the second day. It was jolly and all tips went to the Red Cross, and the tips was big; but it was just as hard work as if they had really been poor working girls, with not enough recreation about it. So the third day they rebelled at the head waiter and made Genevieve herself jump in and carry out trays full of dishes that had served their purpose.

This annoyed Genevieve May very much. It not only upset discipline but made the arms and back ache. So she now went into the kitchen to show the cook how to cook in a more saving manner. Her intentions were beautiful; but the head cook was a sensitive foreigner, and fifteen minutes after she went into his kitchen he had to be arrested for threatening to harm the well-known society matron with a common meat saw.

The new one they got in his place next day let her mess round all she wanted to, knowing his job depended on it, though it was told that he got a heartless devil-may-care look in his eyes the minute he saw her making a cheap fish sauce. But he said nothing.

That hotel does a big business, but it fell off surprising the day after this, twenty-three people having been took bad with poison from something they'd et there at lunch. True, none of these got as fur as the coroner, so it never was known exactly what they'd took in; but the thing made a lot of talk at stricken bedsides

and Genevieve spent a dull day denying that her cooking had done this outrage. Then, her dignity being much hurt, she wrote a letter to the papers saying this hotel man was giving his guests cheap canned goods that had done the trick.

Next morning this brought the hotel man and one of the best lawyers in the state of Washington up to the palatial Popper residence, making threats after they got in that no lady taking up war activities should be obliged to listen to. She got rattled, I guess, or had been dreaming or something. She told the hotel man and lawyer to Ssh! Ssh!—because that new cook had put ground glass in the lemon pie and she had a right to lull his suspicions with this letter to the papers, because she was connected with the Secret Service Department. She would now go back to the hotel and detect this spy committing sabotage on the mashed potatoes, or something, and arrest him—just like that! I don't know whatever put the idea into her head. I believe she had tried to join the Secret Service Department till she found they didn't have uniforms.

Anyway, this hotel man, like the cowardly dog he was, went straight off to some low sneak in the district attorney's office; and he went like a snake in the grass and found out it wasn't so; and a real officer come down on Genevieve May to know what she meant by impersonating a Secret Service agent. This brutal thug talked in a cold but rough way, and I know perfectly well this minute that he wasn't among those invited to the Popper costume ball of the Allied nations. He threw a fine scare into Genevieve May. For about a week she didn't know but she'd be railroaded to Walla Walla. She wore mere civilian creations and acted like a slacker.

But finally she saw the Government was going to live

and let live; so she took up something new. It was still On to Berlin! with Genevieve May.

She wasn't quite up to pulling anything new in her home town; so she went into the outlying districts to teach her grandmother something. I didn't think up the term for it. That was thought up by G. H. Stultz who is her son-in-law and president of the Red Gap Canning Factory. This here new war activity she'd took up consisted of going rough to different places and teaching housewives how to practice economy in putting up preserves, and so on.

It ain't on record that she ever taught one single woman anything about economy, their hard-won knowledge beginning about where hers left off—which wasn't fur from where it started; but she did bring a lot of wholesome pleasure into their simple, hard-working lives.

In this new war activity it wasn't so much how you canned a thing as what you canned. Genevieve May showed 'em how to make mincemeat out of tomatoes and beets; how to make marmalade out of turnips and orange peel; how to make preserves out of apple peelings and carrots; and guava jelly out of mushmelon rinds, or some such thing. She'd go into towns and rent a storeroom and put up her canning outfit, hiring a couple of the lower classes to do the actual work, and invite women to bring in their truck of this kind and learn regular old rock-bottom economy. They'd come, with their stuff that should of been fattening shotes, and Genevieve May would lecture on how to can it. It looked through the glass like sure-enough human food.

Then, after she'd got 'em all taught, she'd say wouldn't it be nice of these ladies to let her sell all this canned stuff and give the proceeds to the different war charities! And there wasn't a woman that didn't

consent readily, having tasted it in the cooking. Not a one of 'em wanted to take home these delicacies. It was right noble or cautious, or something. And after visiting six or eight of these communities Genevieve May had quite a stock of these magic delicacies on sale in different stores and was looking forward to putting the war firmly on its feet—only she couldn't get many reports of sales from this stock.

Then she got a dandy idea. She would come to the Kulanche County Fair at Red Gap, assemble all her stock there, give one of these here demonstrations in economic canning, and auction off the whole lot with a glad hurrah. She thought mebbe, with her influence, she might get Secretary Baker, or someone like that, to come out and do the auctioning—all under the auspices of Mrs. Genevieve May Popper, whose tireless efforts had done so much to teach the dear old Fatherland its lesson, and so on. She now had about three hundred jars and bottles of this stuff after her summer's work, and it looked important.

I got down to the county fair myself last year, having some sure-fire blue-ribbon stock there, and it was then that I hear G. H. Stultz talking about this here mother-in-law of his, he taking me aside at their home one night, so his wife, Lucille, wouldn't hear.

"This respected lady is trying to teach her grandmother how to suck eggs—no more, no less," he says. "Now she's coming here to pull something off. You watch her—that's all I ask. Everything that woman touches goes funny. Look how she poisoned those innocent people up at that hotel. And I'll bet this canned stuff she's going to sell off will kill even mere tasters. If she only hadn't come to my town! That woman don't seem to realize that I'm cursed with a German name and have to be miles above suspicion.

"Suppose she sells off this stuff! I give you my word she puts things in it that even a professional canning factory wouldn't dare to. And suppose it poisons off a lot of our best patriots! Do you think a mob will be very long blaming me for a hand in it? Why, it'll have me, in no time at all, reaching my feet down for something solid that has been carefully removed."

I tried to cheer the man up, but he was scared stiff.

"Mark my words," he says. "She'll pull a bloomer! If that woman could go into an innocent hotel kitchen, where every care is taken to keep things right, and poison off twenty-three people till they picked at the covers and had relatives wondering what might be in their safe-deposit boxes, think what she'd do in the great unsanitary outside, where she can use her imagination!

"There's but one salvation for me; I must have trusted agents in the crowd when that stuff is auctioned off, and they got to collar every last bottle of it, no matter what the cost. I have to lay down like a pup on the next bond drive, but this is my only hope. For the Lord's sake, don't you go there and start bidding things up, no matter who she gets for auctioneer! Don't you bid—even if Woodrow Wilson himself comes out."

That's the impression Genevieve May had made on her own daughter's husband, who is a clear-seeing man and a good citizen. And it looked like he must secretly buy up her output. She not only come to town with her canning outfit and her summer's stock of strange preserves, all beauteous in their jars, but she brought with her to auction off this stuff a regular French flying man with an honourable record.

She'd met this French officer in the city and enter-

tained him at the palatial Popper home; and mebbe she'd hypnotized him. He wasn't in good shape, anyway. First place, he'd been fighting in the air for three years and had been wounded in five places—including the Balkans. Then, like that wasn't enough for one man, he'd been sent over here to teach our men to fly when they got a machine; and over here he'd fell out of a cloud one day when his brake or something went wrong, and this had give him a nice pleasant vacation on crutches.

Genevieve had fastened on him at a time when he probably hadn't the steely resistance Frenchmen been showing on the West Front. Or, being in a strange country, mebbe he didn't know when politeness to Genevieve May Popper would become mere cowardice. Anyway, he could talk English well enough; and Genevieve May brought him to town and made a big hit.

First thing she done was to set up her stock of canned goods in a section they give her in Horticultural Hall. Them three hundred bottles took up a lot of room and showed up grand between the fancy-work section, consisting of embroideries, sofa cushions, and silk patch quilts, and the art section, consisting of hand paintings of interesting objects by bright pupils in the public school. Then she put in her canning outfit, with a couple of hired natives to do the work while she lectured on the science of it and tried to get weak-minded patriots to taste things.

Genevieve May had a good time at these demonstrations, speaking in tones of oratory and persuasion and encouraging the tasters to take a chance. She certainly had discovered some entirely new flavours that the best chemists hadn't stumbled on. She was proud of this, but a heap prouder of her French flying man.

When she wasn't thinking up new infamies with rutabagas and watermelon rinds, she'd be showing him off to the fair crowds. She give the impression when she paraded him that the French Army would of had few flyers if she hadn't stepped into the breach.

And mebbe she wasn't desperate with fear that some of the Red Gap society buds and matrons would want to stick in with nursing and attentions for the interesting invalid! Nothing like that with Genevieve May! She kept closer guard on that man than he would of got in the worst German prison camp. About the only other person in town she'd trust him to was Cousin Egbert Floud.

Cousin Egbert liked the Frenchman a lot at first, and rode him round town to see the canning factory and the new waterworks and the Chamber of Commerce, and Price's Addition to Red Gap, and so on. Also, he'd drag him all over the fair grounds to look at prize bulls and windmills and patent silos.

Cousin Egbert had refused from the first to taste any of Genevieve May's deviltry with the vegetable kingdom. He swore he was on a diet and the doctor wouldn't answer for his life if he even tasted anything outside. He was telling me that last day of the fair that the woman ought to be arrested for carrying on so, Genevieve May being now busy with some highly artificial ketchup made of carrots, and something else unimportant, with pure vegetable dyes.

"Yes; and she just tried to hand me that same old stuff about what her Japanese maid calls her," he says to me at this time. "She says I could never guess what that funny little mite calls her. And I says no, I never could of guessed it if she hadn't already told me; but I says I know it is Madam Peach Blossom, and that Jap maid sure is one funny little mite, thinking up a

thing like that, the Japanese being a serious race and not given to saying laughable things."

That's Cousin Egbert all over. He ain't a bit like one of them courters of the old French courts that you read about in the Famous Crimes of History.

"Madam Peach Blossom!" he says, snickering bitterly. "Say, ain't them Japs got a great sense of humour! I bet what she meant was Madam Lemon Blossom!"

Anyway, Genevieve May trusted her flying man to this here brutal cynic when she wouldn't of trusted him to any of the younger, dancing set. And Cousin Egbert pretty near made him late for his great engagement to auction off the strange preserves. It was on this third day of the fair, and Genevieve May was highly excited about it.

She had her stock set up in tiers against the wall and looking right imposing in the polished glass; and she had a box in front where the Frenchman would stand when he did the auctioning.

That hall was hot, let me tell you, with the high sun beating down on the thin boards. I looked in a minute before the crowd come, and it looked like them preserves had sure had a second cooking, standing there day after day.

And this Cousin Egbert, when he should of been leading the Frenchman back to Horticultural Hall to the auction block, was dragging him elsewhere to see a highly exciting sight. So he said. He was innocent enough. He wanted to give that Frenchman a good time, he told me afterward. So he tells him something is going to take place over at the race track that will thrill him to the bone, and come on quick and hurry over!

The Frenchman is still using one crutch and the crowd is already surging in that direction; but after

finding out it ain't any more silos or windmills, he relies on Cousin Egbert that it really is exciting, and they manage to get through the crowd, though it was excited even now and stepped on him and pushed him a lot.

Still he was game, all right. I've always said that. He was about as excited as the crowd; and Cousin Egbert was, too, I guess, by the time they had pushed up to the railing. I guess he was wondering what Wild Western kind of deviltry he was going to see now. Cousin Egbert had told him it wasn't a horse race; but he wouldn't tell him what it was, wishing to keep it for a glad surprise when the Frenchman would see it with his own eyes.

"Just you wait one minute now!" says Cousin Egbert. "You wait one minute and I bet you'll be glad you got through that rough crowd with me. You'd go through ten crowds like that, crutch or no crutch, to see what's going to be here."

The poor man was kind of used up, but he stands there waiting for the thrill, with Cousin Egbert beaming on him fondly, like a father that's going in one minute to show the little tots what Santa Claus brought 'em on the tree.

Then the Frenchman hears a familiar roar and a airplane starts up from the lower end of the field inside the track.

"There!" says Cousin Egbert. "Now I guess you're glad you pushed in here, leg or no leg. I knew it would be a dandy surprise for you. Yes, sir; the committee got a regular airplane to give a thrilling flight right here in front of us. You look up in the sky there and pretty soon you'll see it just as plain, sailing round and round like some great bird; and they say this man flying it is going to loop the loop twice in succession. Now I bet you're glad you come!"

Cousin Egbert says right at this minute he begun to take a dislike to the Frenchman. After he'd took all that trouble to get him there to see something exciting, the Frenchman just looked at him kind of sad for a long time, and then says he believes he'd rather go back some place where he can set down and rest his leg.

Cousin Egbert says he turned out to be like the Frenchmen you read about that is blasé about everything in the world and kind of tired of life, not having the least bit of interest in whatever happens. But, of course, he was polite to his guest and helped push a way back through the crowd, with the crowd more excited than ever by this time, because the flying machine was right up in the air, hundreds of feet off the ground.

"You'll think I'm a liar," he says to me; "but it's the God's truth this Frenchman just kept pushing through that crowd and didn't even turn to look up in the air when this man was actually risking his life by looping the loop twice in succession. He never turned his head the least bit."

Cousin Egbert says, here he'd been up in one himself and knew what flying meant, but he probably wouldn't of took the least notice if this dare-devil had been killed right there before thousands.

"I don't understand it," he says. "It sure wouldn't be the least use boosting for a brighter and busier Red Gap if everybody was as cold-blooded as the French." He was right grouchy about the French after this.

Anyway, he got his suffering man back to Horticultural Hall somewhat the worse for being stepped on by the crowd; in fact, the Frenchman is kind of all in when he gets to the auction block. He sets right down on it looking white, and Genevieve May gets him a glass of water to revive him. Pretty soon he says he's nearly as well as ever, but that wasn't much.

Now the patriots for the auction begun to throng in and Genevieve May is once more proud and fluttering. She glances fondly at her noble array of jars, with these illegitimate preserves shining richly through, and she gets the Frenchman on his feet and onto the box; and the crowd cheers like mad and presses close. I was standing close to G. H. Stultz, and he whispers to me:

"My Lord! If there was only some means of getting that stock into the German commissary! But I'm told they analyze everything. Anyway, I got my bidders planted and I'll have to buy up the stock if it breaks me."

Then the Frenchman begun to talk in a very nice way. He said a few words about his country—how they had been fighting all these years, not knowing whether they could win or not, but meaning to fight till there wasn't any fighters left; and how grateful France was for the timely aid of this great country and for the efforts of beautiful ladies like Madam Popper, and so on.

You bet no one laughed, even if he didn't talk such very good English. They didn't even laugh when he said beautiful ladies like Madam Popper, though Cousin Egbert, somewhere off in the crowd, made an undignified sound which he pretended was coughing.

The Frenchman then said he would now ask for bids for these beautiful table delicacies, which were not only of rich food value but were more priceless than gold and jewels because of having been imprisoned in the crystal glass by the fair hands of the beautiful Madam Popper; and what was he offered for six bottles of this unspeakable jelly?

Of course G. H. Stultz would of had 'em in no time if the panic hadn't saved him. Yes, sir; right then something terrible and unforeseen happened to cause a frightful panic. About five of them jars of preserves

blew up with loud reports. Of course everyone's first thought was that a German plot was on to lay Horticultural Hall in ruins with dynamite. It sounded such. No one thought it was merely these strange preserves that had been working overtime in that furnace.

Women screamed and strong men made a dash for the door over prostrate bodies. And then a lot more explosions took place. The firing became general, as the reports say. Bottle after bottle shot its dread contents into the fray, and many feeble persons was tromped on by the mob.

It wasn't any joke for a minute. The big jars, mostly loaded with preserves, went off with heavy reports; then there was these smaller bottles, filled with artificial ketchup and corked. They went off like a battery of light field guns, putting down a fierce barrage of ketchup on one and all. It was a good demonstration of the real thing, all right. I ain't never needed any one since that to tell me what war is.

The crowd was two thirds out before any one realized just what kind of frightfulness was going on. Then, amid shot and shell that would still fly from time to time, the bravest, that hadn't been able to fight their way out, stood by and picked up the wounded under fire and helped brush their clothes off. The groans of the sufferers mingled with the hiss of escaping ketchup.

Genevieve May was in hysterics from the minute the first high-powered gun was fired. She kept screaming for everyone to keep cool. And at last, when they got some kind of order, she went into a perfectly new fit because her Frenchman was missing. She kept it up till they found the poor man. He was found, without his crutch, at the far end of the hall, though no one has ever yet figgered how he could get there through the frenzied mob. He was on a chair, weak and trembling,

behind a fancy quilt made by Grandma Watkins, containing over ten thousand pieces of silk. He was greenish yellow in colour and his heart had gone wrong.

That'll show you this bombardment wasn't any joke. The poor man had been exhausted by Cousin Egbert's well-meant efforts to show him something exciting, and he was now suffering from sure-enough shell shock, which he'd had before in more official circumstances.

He was a brave man; he'd fought like a tiger in the trenches, and had later been shot down out of the air four times, and was covered with wounds and medals and crosses; but this here enfilade at the fair hands of the beautiful Madam Popper, coming in his weak state, had darn near devastated what few nerves the war had left him.

It was a sad moment. Genevieve May was again exploding, like her own handiwork, which wasn't through itself yet by any means, because a solitary shot would come now and then, like the main enemy had retreated but was leaving rear guards and snipers. Also, people that had had exhibits in the art section and the fancywork section was now setting up yells of rage over their treasures that had been desecrated by the far-flung ketchup.

But tender hands was leading the stricken Frenchman back of the lines to a dressing station, and all was pretty near calm again, except for G. H. Stultz, who was swearing—or words to that effect.

It really took a good hour to restore perfect calm and figure up the losses. They was severe. Of course I don't mean to say the whole three hundred bottles of this ammunition dump had exploded. Some had been put up only a short while and hadn't had time to go morbid; and even some of the old stuff had remained staunch.

The mincemeat shrapnel had proved fairly destructive, but the turnip marmalade didn't seem to of developed much internal energy. All of them jars of marmalade proved to be what they call "duds." But you bet enough had gone up to make a good battle sketch. The ketchup, especial, was venomous.

I met G. H. Stultz as I left the trenches. He'd been caught in a machine-gun nest of ketchup and had only wiped about half of it off his face. He looked like a contagious disease.

"Say, look here," he says; "you can't tell me there isn't a Providence ever watching over this world to give some of us just what's coming to us!" That was very silly, because I'd never told him anything of the sort.

Then I go out into No Man's Land and meet Cousin Egbert by a lemonade stand. He was one radiant being. He asked me to have a glass of the beverage, and I done so; and while I was sipping it he says brightly:

"Wasn't that some gorgeous display of fireworks? And wasn't it fine to stand there and watch them bottles laugh their heads off at this food profiteer?"

I said he ought to be right sorry for her—after all the work she'd done.

"Not me!" he says firmly. "She never done any work in her life except to boost her own social celebrity."

Then he took another gulp of his lemonade and says, very bitter:

"Madam Peach Blossom! I wonder what that funny little mite of hers will say when she sees her to-night? Something laughable, I bet—like it would be 'Madam Onion Blossom!'—or something comical, just to give her a good laugh after her hard day."

Such is Cousin Egbert, and ever will be. And Genevieve May, having took up things all round the circle, is now back to the dance.

X

AS TO HERMAN WAGNER

IT HAD been a toilsome day for Ma Pettengill and me. Since sunup we had ridden more than a score of mountain miles on horses that could seldom exceed a crawl in pace. At dawn we had left the flatlands along the little timbered river, climbed to the lava beds of the first mesa, traversed a sad stretch of these where even the sage grew scant, and come, by way of a winding defile that was soon a mounting cañon, into big hills unending.

Here for many hours we had laboured over furtive, tortuous trails, aimless and lost, it might have seemed, but that ever and again we came upon small bands of cattle moving one way. These showed that we had a mission and knew, after all, what we were about. These cattle were knowingly bent toward the valley and home. They went with much of a businesslike air, stopping only at intervals to snatch at the sparse short grass that grows about the roots of the sagebrush. They had come a long journey from their grazing places, starting when the range went bad and water holes dried, and now seemed glad indeed to give up the wild free life of a short summer and become tended creatures again, where strangely thoughtful humans would lavish cut grass upon them for certain obscure but doubtless benevolent purposes of their own.

It was our mission this day to have a look-see, mebbe as far as Horsefly Mountain, and get a general idee of

how many head was already coming down to eat up the so-and-so shortest hay crop that had ever been stacked on the Arrowhead since the dry winter of '98, when beef fell to two cents a pound, with darned few takers at that.

It was really a day of scenic delight, if one hadn't to reflect sorely upon the exigencies of the beef-cattle profession, and at least one of us was free of this thrall.

What we reached at last were small mountains rather than big hills; vast exclamatory remnants of shattered granite and limestone, thickly timbered, reckless of line, sharp of peak. One minute cañon we viewed from above was quite preposterous in its ambitions, having colour and depth and riot of line in due proportions and quite worthy of the grand scale. It wasn't a Grand Cañon, but at least it was a baby grand, and I loitered on its brink until reminded sharply that I'd better pour leather into that there skate if I wanted to make home that night.

I devoutly did wish to make home that night, for the spot we were on was barren of those little conveniences I am accustomed to. Moreover, the air was keen and a hunger, all day in the building, called for strong meats. So I not too reluctantly passed on from this scenic miniature of parlour dimensions—and from the study of a curious boulder thereby which had intrigued me not a little.

Now we were home and relaxed by the Arrowhead fireside, after a moving repast of baked young sage hens. The already superior dynamics of the meal, moreover, had been appreciably heightened by a bottle of Uncle Henry's homemade grape wine, which he warmly recommends for colds or parties, or anything like that. It had proved to be a wine of almost a too-recent *crû*. Ma Pettengill said that if Uncle Henry was aiming to put it on the market in quantity production he had ought to name it the Stingaree brand, because it was sure some

stuff, making for malevolence even to the lengths of matricide, if that's what killing your mother is called. She said, even at a Polish wedding down across the tracks of a big city, it would have the ambulances and patrol wagons clanging up a good half hour quicker than usual.

Be that as it may, or is, when I had expected sleep to steal swiftly to the mending of the day's ravages I merely found myself wakeful and wondering. This stuff of Uncle Henry's is an able ferment. I wondered about a lot of things. And at the same time I wondered interminably about that remarkable boulder at the side of the Tom Thumb Grand Cañon. I was even wakeful enough and discursive enough—my hostess had taken but one glass from the bottle—to wonder delightedly about all rocks and stones, and geology, and that sort of thing. It was almost scientific, the way I wondered, as I sat there idly toying with my half-filled glass.

Take this particular boulder, for example. It had once been mere star dust, hadn't it? Some time ago, I mean, or thereabouts. But it had been star dust; and then, next thing it knew, it got to be a kind of cosmic stew, such as leisurely foreigners patch out highways with, and looking no more like a granite boulder than anything.

Then something happened, like someone letting the furnace fire go out the night of the big freeze; and this stuff I'm talking about grew cold and discouraged, and quit flat, apparently not caring a hoot what shape it would be found in years and years later, the result being that it was found merely in the general shape of rocks or boulders—to use the more scientific term—which is practically no shape at all, as you might say, being quite any shape that happens, or the shape of rocks and boulders as they may be seen on almost every hand by those of us who have learned to see in the true sense of the word.

I have had to be brief in this shorter science course on the earth's history before the time of man, because more important matters claim my attention and other speakers are waiting. The point is that this boulder up there by the dwarf cañon had survived from unremembered chaos; had been melted, stewed, baked, and chilled until it had no mind of its own left; then bumped round by careless glaciers until it didn't care where it came to rest; and at last, after a few hundred million years of stony unconcern for its ultimate fate, here it had been drawn by the cunning hand of man sprang into the complex mechanism of our industrial human scramble.

That is to say, this boulder I speak of, the size of a city hall, lying there in noble neglect since long before wise old water animals were warning their children that this here fool talk about how you could go up out of the water and walk round on dry land would get folks into trouble, because how could a body breathe up there when there wasn't any water to breathe in? And the fools that tried it would soon find out; and serve 'em right! Well, I mean to say, this boulder that had lain inert and indifferent while the ages wrought man from a thing of one cell—and not much of a cell at that—bore across that face of it nearest the winding trail, a lettered appeal, as from one man to another. The letters were large and neatly done in white paint and the brushwork was recent. And the letters said, with a good deal of pathos, it seemed to me:

WAGNER'S SYLVAN GLEN, ONLY THIRTY-TWO MILES.
HERMAN WAGNER, SOLE PROP.

Let this teach us, one and all, this morning, that everything in Nature has its use if we but search diligently. I mean, even big rocks like this, which are too

big to build homes or even courthouses of. May we not, at least, paint things on them in plain letters with periods and commas, and so on, and so give added impetus to whatever is happening to us?

But the evening wears on and the whipping mental urge of grape juice meddled with by Uncle Henry wears off. And so, before it all ends, what about Herman Wagner, Sole Prop. of Wagner's Sylvan Glen?

I know it has been a hard day, but let us try to get the thing in order. Why not begin cautiously with a series of whys? Why any particular sylvan glen in a country where everything is continuously and overwhelmingly sylvan and you can't heave a rock without hitting a glen? Really, you can't walk fifty yards out there without stepping on a glen—or in a glen; it doesn't matter. What I am earnestly trying to get at is, if this Herman Wagner wanted to be sole prop. of a sylvan glen, why should be have gone thirty-two miles farther for one? Why didn't he have it right there? Why insanely push thirty-two miles on in a country where miles mean something serious? Up-and-down miles, tilted horribly or standing on edge!

It didn't seem astute. And Herman achieved simply no persuasion whatever with me by stocking in that "only." He could have put only all over the rock and it would still have been thirty-two miles, wouldn't it? Only indeed! You might think the man was saying "Only ten minutes' walk from the post office"—or something with a real meaning like that. I claimed then and I claim now that he should have omitted the only and come out blunt with the truth. There are times in this world when the straight and bitter truth is better without any word-lace. This Wagner person was a sophist. So I said to him, now, as a man will at times:

"All right, Herman, old top! But you'll have to think up something better than only to put before those thirty-two miles. If you had said 'Only two miles' it might have had its message for me. But thirty more than that! Be reasonable! Why not pick out a good glen that parties can slip off to for a quiet evening without breaking up a whole week? Frankly, I don't understand you and your glen. But you can bet I'll find out about it!"

So, right away, I said to Ma Pettengill, who by this time had a lot of bills and papers and ledgers and stuff out on her desk, and was talking hotly to all of them—I said to her that there was nearly half a bottle of Uncle Henry's wine left, his rare old grape wine laid down well over a month ago; so she had better toss off a foamy beaker of it—yes, it still foamed—and answer me a few questions.

It was then she said the things about that there wine being able to inflate the casualty lists, even of Polish weddings, which are already the highest known to the society page of our police-court records. She said, further, that she had took just enough of the stuff at dinner to make her think she wasn't entirely bankrupt, and she wanted to give these here accounts a thorough going-over while the sensation lasted.

Not wishing to hurt Uncle Henry's feelings, even if he didn't catch me at it, I partook again of the fervent stuff, and fell into new wonder at the seeming imbecility of Herman Wagner. I found myself not a little moved by the pathos of him. It was little enough I could get from Ma Pettengill at first. She spoke almost shortly to me when I asked her things she had to stop adding silly figures to answer.

What I found out was mostly my own work, putting two and two in their fit relationship. Even the mention

of Herman Wagner's full name brought nothing about himself. I found it most annoying. I would say: "Come on, now; what about this Herman Wagner that paints wheedling messages across the face of Nature?" And to this fair, plain query I would merely have more of the woman's endless help troubles. All that come looking for work these days was stormy petrels, not caring if they worked or not—just asking for it out of habit.

Didn't she have a singing teacher, a painless dentist, a crayon-portrait artist and a condemned murderer on her payroll this very minute, all because the able-bodied punchers had gone over to see that nasty little Belgium didn't ever again attack Germany in that ruthless way? She had read that it cost between thirty and thirty-five thousand dollars to wound a soldier in battle. Was that so? Well, she'd tell me that she stood ready to wound any of these that was left behind for between thirty and thirty-five cents, on easy payments. Wound 'em severely, too! Not mere scratches.

Presently again I would utter Herman Wagner, only to be told that these dry cows she was letting go for sixty dollars—you come to cut 'em up for beef and you'd have to grease the saw first. Or I heard what a scandal it was that lambs actually brought five-fifty, and the Government at Washington, D. C., setting back idly under the outrage!

Then I heard, with perfect irrelevance to Herman Wagner, that she wouldn't have a puncher on the place that owned his own horse. Because why? Because he'd use him gentle all day and steal grain for him at night. Also, that she had some kind of rheumatiz in her left shoulder; but she'd rather be a Christian Scientist and fool herself than pay a doctor to do the same. It may all have been true, but it was not important;

not germane to the issue, as we so often say in writing editorials.

It looked so much like a blank for Herman Wagner that I quit asking for a time and let the woman toil at her foolish ruinous tasks.

After half an hour of it she began to rumble a stanza of By Cool Siloam's Shady Rill; so I chanced it again, remarking on the sign I had observed that day. So she left her desk for a seat before the fire and said yes, and they was other signs of Herman's hid off in the mountains where no one but cows, that can't read a line, would see 'em. She also divulged that Herman, himself, wasn't anything you'd want a bronze statue of to put up in Courthouse Square.

Well then, come on, now! What about him? No, sir; not by a darned sight! With that there desk full of work, she simply could not stop to talk now. She did.

Is that the only sign of Herman's you saw? He's got others along them trails. You'll see an arrow in white paint, pointing to his sylvan glen, and warnings not to go to other glens till you've tried his. One says: You've tried the rest; now try the best! Another says: Try Wagner's Sylvan Glen for Boating, Bathing, and Fishing. Meals at all hours! And he's got one that shows he studied American advertising as soon as he landed in this country. It says: Wagner's Sylvan Glen—Not How Good, But How Cheap!

I don't know. I ain't made up my mind about Herman, even yet. If it wasn't for why he had to leave Nevada and if I knew there could be more than one kind of German, then I'd almost say Herman was the other kind. But, of course, there can't be but one kind, and he showed the Prussian strain fast enough in why he come

up from Reno. Still and all, he's got his engaging points as a pure imbecile or something.

He don't tell me why he left Reno for a long time after he gets here; not till I'd won his confidence by showing I was a German sympathizer. It was when Sandy Sawtelle had a plan for a kind of grand war measure. His grand war measure was to get some secret agents into Germany and kill off all the women under fifty. He said if you done this the stock would die out, because look at the game laws against killing does! He told this to everybody. He told it to Herman; but Herman knew enough to remain noncommittal 'bout it. He told it to me, and I saw right off it probably couldn't be managed right; and, even if it could be, I said to Sandy, it seemed to me somehow like it would be sort of inhuman.

Herman heard me say this and got the idea I was a pacifist and a secret friend of his country; so he confided to me the secret of why he left Reno to keep from having his heart cut out by Manuel Romares. But no matter!

Anyway, last year in the spring this Herman dropped by, looking for work. He hadn't been in America long, having stopped with his uncle in Cincinnati a while, and then coming West on a life of adventure and to take up a career. He said now he'd come up from Nevada, where he'd been working on a sheep ranch, and he acted like he wanted to get into something respectable and lead a decent life again.

Well, it had got so I hired everything that come along; so why not Herman? I grabbed at him. The boys heard he was a German alien and acted, at first, like a bunch of hogs with a bear about; but I'd of hired old Hinderburg himself if he'd offered and put him to doing something worth while.

This Herman was the first man ever worked here in

side whiskers. He told me, after I showed myself a German sympathizer, that in the beginning of the war he'd wore one of them moustaches like the Kaiser puts up in tin fasteners every night after he's said his prayers; but this had made him an object of unpleasant remark, including missiles. So he had growed this flowering border round it to take off the curse.

They was beautiful shiny side whiskers and entirely innocent-looking. In the right clothes Herman could of gone into any Sabbath school in the land and said he was glad to see so many bright little faces there this morning, and now what was to-day's golden text, and so on. That's what he looked like. These things fell like portières each side of his face, leaving his chin as naked as the day he was born. He didn't have any too much under his mouth either; so I guess the whiskers was really a mercy to his face.

He admitted he didn't know too much about the cow business, but said he was willing to learn; so I put him on the payroll. We found he was willing to try anything that looked easy; for instance, like setting on colts for the first time. The first morning he went to work it was rainy, with the ground pretty wet, and he was out to the corral watching Sandy Sawtelle break a colt. That's the best time to handle colts that has never been set on. They start to act up and pour someone out of the saddle; then they slip and slide, helpless, and get the idea a regler demon of a rider is up there, and give in. So the boys give Herman a fussy two-year-old, and Herman got away with it not so bad.

Of course he was set off a few times, but not hard; and the colt, slicking over this wet ground, must of thought another star rider had come to town. Two days later, though, when the ground was dry, Herman got on the same wild animal again, and it wasn't there

when he come down from his first trip aloft. It traded ends with him neatly and was off in a corner saying: "Well, looks like that German ain't such a dandy rider after all! I couldn't pull that old one with him yesterday, but I certainly done it good to-day."

I wasn't near enough to hear what Herman said when he picked himself up; but I'm a good lip reader since I been going to these moving pictures, and I'm way mistaken if he hadn't learned two or three good things in English to call a horse at certain times.

He walked for several days with trench feet, and his morale was low indeed. He was just that simple. He'd try things that sane punchers wouldn't go looking for, if sober; in fact, he was so simple you might call him simple-minded and not get took up for malicious slander.

So it come to where we seen he wasn't good for anything on this ranch but chore boy. And naturally we needed a chore boy, like we needed everything else. He could get up wood, and feed the pigs we was fattening, and milk the three dairy cows, and make butter, and help in the kitchen. But as for being a cow hand, he wasn't even the first joint on your little finger. He was willing, but his Maker had stopped right at that point with him. And he had a right happy time being chore boy.

Of course the boys kidded him a lot after they found out he could positively not be enraged by the foulest aspersions on the character of the Kaiser and his oldest son. They seen he was just an innocent dreamer, mooning round the place at his humble tasks. They spent a lot of good time thinking up things for him.

He'd brought a German shotgun with silver trimmings with him, which he called a fowling piece, and he wanted to hunt in his few leisure moments; so the boys

told him all the kinds of game that run wild on the place.

There was the cross-feathered snee, I remember, which was said by the bird books to be really the same as the sidehill mooney. It has one leg shorter than the other and can be captured by hand if driven to level ground, where it falls over on its side in a foolish manner when it tries to run. Herman looked forward to having one of these that he could stuff and send to his uncle in Cincinnati, who wrote that he had never seen such a bird.

Also, he spent a lot of time down on the crick flat looking for a mu, which is the same as a sneeze-duck, except for the parallel stripes. It has but one foot webbed; so it swims in a circle and can be easy shot by the sportsman, who first baits it with snuff that it will go miles to get. Another wild beast they had him hunting was the filo, which is like the ruffle snake, except that it has a thing like a table leg in its ear. It gets up on a hill and peeks over at you, but will never come in to lunch. The boys said they nearly had one over on Grizzly Peak one time, but it swallowed its tail and become invisible to the human eye, though they could still hear its low note of pleading. Also, they had Herman looking for a mated couple of the spinach bug for which the Smithsonian Institution had offered a reward of five hundred dollars, cash.

Herman fell for it all—all this old stuff that I had kicked the slats out of my trundle-bed laughing at. And in between exciting adventures with his fowling piece he'd write himself some pieces of poetry in a notebook, all about the cows and the clouds and other natural objects. He would also recite poetry written by other Germans, if let. And at night he'd play on a native instrument shaped like a potato, by blowing into

one cavity and stopping up other cavities to make the notes. It would be slow music and make you think of the quiet old churchyard where your troubles would be o'er; and why not get there as soon as possible? Sad music!

So Herman was looked on as a harmless imbecile by one and all till Eloise Plummer come over to help in the kitchen while the haying crew was here last summer. And Eloise looked on him as something else. She looked on Herman as one of them that make it unsafe for girls to leave home. She had good reason to.

Eloise is in the prime of young womanhood; but this is just exactly as fur as any fair-minded judge would go to say of her as a spectacle. Her warmest adherents couldn't hardly get any warmer than that if put under oath. She has a heart of gold undoubtedly, but a large and powerful face that would belong rightly to the head director of a steel corporation that's worked his way up from the bottom.

It is not a face that has ever got Eloise pestered with odious attentions from the men. Instead of making 'em smirk and act rough, but playful, it made 'em think that life, after all, is more serious than most of us suspect in our idle moments. It certainly is a face to make men think. And inspiring this black mood in men had kind of reacted on Eloise till they couldn't quite see what they was ever intended for. It was natural.

I don't say the girl could of cooked all winter in a lumber camp and not been insulted a time or two; but it wasn't fur from that with her.

So you can imagine how bitter she was when this Herman nut tried to make up to her. Herman was a whirlwind wooer; I'll say that for him. He told her right off that she was beautiful as the morning star and tried to kiss her hand. None of these foolish prelimi-

naries for Herman, like "Lovely weather we're having!" or "What's your favourite flower?"

Eloise was quick-natured, too. She put him out of the kitchen with a coal shovel, after which Herman told her through a crack of the door that she was a Lorelei.

Eloise, at first, misunderstood this term entirely, and wasn't much less insulted when she found it meant one of these German hussies that hang round creeks for no good purpose. Not that her attitude discouraged Herman any; he played under her window that night, and also sang a rich custard sort of tenor in his native tongue, till I had to threaten him with the bastile to get any sleep myself.

Next day he fetched her regal gifts, consisting of two polished abalone shells, a picture of the Crown Prince in a brass frame, and a polished-wood paper knife with Greetings from Reno! on it.

Eloise was now like an enraged goddess or something; and if Herman hadn't been a quick bender and light on his feet she wouldn't of missed him with his gifts. As it was, he ducked in time and went out to the spring house to write a poem on her beauty, which he later read to her in German through a kitchen window that was raised. The window was screened; so he read it all. Later he gets Sandy Sawtelle to tell her this poem is all about how coy she is. Every once in a while you could get an idea partway over on Herman. He was almost certain Eloise was coy.

By the end of that second day, after Herman threw kisses to her for ten minutes from on top of the woodshed, where he was safe, she telephoned her brother to come over here quick, if he had the soul of a man in his frame, and kill Herman like he would a mad dog.

But Eloise left the next morning, without waiting for anything suitable to be pulled off by her family. It

was because, when she went to bed that night, she found a letter from Herman pinned to her pillow. It had a red heart on it, pierced by a dagger that was dropping red drops very sentimentally; and it said would she not hasten to take her vast beauty out in the moonlight, to walk with Herman under the quiet trees while the nightingale warbled and the snee, or side-hill mooney, called to its lovemate? And here, as they walked, they could plan their beautiful future together.

This was beyond Eloise even with a full battery of kitchen utensils at hand. She left before breakfast; and Herman had to come in and wash dishes.

The next excitement was Herman committing suicide, out in the woodshed, with a rope he'd took off a new packsaddle. Something interrupted him after he got the noose adjusted and was ready to step off the chopping block he stood on. I believe it was one more farewell note to the woman that sent him to his grave. Only he got interested in it and put in a lot more of his own poetry and run out of paper, and had to get more from the house; and he must of forgot what he went to the woodshed for because an hour after that he committed an entirely new suicide with his fowling piece.

Near as I could gather, he was all ready to pull the trigger, looking down into this here frowning muzzle before a mirror; and then something about his whiskers in the mirror must of caught his eye. Anyway, another work of self-destruction was off. So he come in and helped with lunch. Then he told me he'd like to take some time off, because he was going up to the deep pool to drown himself.

I said was he really bent on it? He said it was requisite, because away from this beautiful lady, who had torn his heart out and danced on it, he could not con-

tinue to live, even for one day. So I come down on Herman. I told him that, hard up as I was for help, I positively would not have a man on the place who was always knocking off work to kill himself. It et into his time, and also it took the attention of others who longed to see him do it.

I said I might stand for a suicide or two—say, once a month, on a quiet Sunday—but I couldn't stand this here German thoroughness that kept it up continual. At least, if he hoped to keep on drawing pay from me, he'd have to make way with himself in his own leisure moments and not on my time.

Herman says I don't know the depths of the human heart. I says I know what I pay him a month, and that's all I'm needing to know in this emergency. I thought, of course, he'd calm down and forget his nonsense; but not so. He moped and mooned, and muttered German poetry to himself for another day, without ever laying a violent hand on himself; but then he come and said it was no good. He says, however, he will no longer commit suicide at this place, where none have sympathy with him and many jeer. Instead, he will take his fowling piece to some far place in the great still mountains and there, at last, do the right thing by himself.

I felt quite snubbed, but my patience was wore out; so I give Herman the money that was coming to him, wished him every success in his undertaking, and let him go.

The boys scouted round quite a bit the next few days, listening for the shot and hoping to come on what was left; but they soon forgot it. Me? I knew one side of Herman by that time. I knew he would be the most careful boy in every suicide he committed. If I'd been a life-insurance company it wouldn't have counted

against him so much as the coffee habit or going without rubbers.

And—sure enough—about two months later the dead one come to life. Herman rollicked in one night with news that he had wandered far into the hills till he found the fairest spot on earth; that quickly made him forget his great sorrow. His fairest spot was a half section of bad land a hopeful nester had took up back in the hills. It had a little two-by-four lake on it and a grove of spruce round the lake; and Herman had fell in love with it like with Eloise.

He'd stay with the nester, who was half dead with lonesomeness, so that even a German looked good to him, and wrote to his uncle in Cincinnati for money to buy the place. And now I'd better hurry over and see it, because it was Wagner's Sylvan Glen, with rowing, bathing, fishing, and basket parties welcome. Yes, sir! It goes to show you can't judge a German like you would a human.

I laughed at first; but no one ever got to Herman that way. He was firm and delighted. That Sylvan Glen was just the finest resort anywhere round! Why, if it was within five miles of Cincinnati or Munich it would be worth a million dollars! And so on. It done no good to tell him it was not within five miles of these towns and never would be. And it done less good to ask him where his customers was coming from, there not being a soul nearer him than twenty miles, and then only scattered ranchers that has got their own idea of a good time after the day's work is over, which positively is not riding off to anybody's glen, no matter how sylvan.

"The good people will come soon enough. You'll see!" says Herman. "They soon find out the only place for miles round where they can get a good pig's knuckle, or blood sausage and a glass Rhine wine—or

maybe beer—after a hard day's work. I got a fine boat on the lake—they can row and push all round over the water; and I'm getting a house put up with vines on it, like a fairy palace, and little tables outside! You see! The people will come when they hear!"

That was Herman. He never stopped to ask where they was coming from. He'd make the place look like a Dutch beer garden and they'd just have to come from somewhere, because what German ever saw a beer garden that didn't have people coming to it? I reckoned up that Herman would have enough custom to make the place pay, the quick rate our country is growing, in about two hundred and forty-five or fifty years.

So that's Wagner's Sylvan Glen you seen advertised. It's there all right; and Herman is there, waiting for trade, with a card back of his little bar that says, in big letters: Keep Smiling! I bet if you dropped in this minute you'd find him in a black jacket and white apron, with a bill of fare wrote in purple ink. He thinks people will soon drop in from twenty miles off to get a cheese sandwich or a dill pickle, or something.

Two of the boys was over this last June when he had his grand opening. They was the only person there except a man from Surprise Valley that was looking for stock and got lost. Buck Devine says the place looked as swell as something you'd see round Chicago.

Herman has a scow on the pond, and a dozen little green tables outside under the spruce trees, with all the trees whitewashed neatly round the bottoms, and whitewashed stones along the driveway, and a rustic gate with Welcome to Wagner's Sylvan Glen! over it. And he's got some green tubs with young spruces planted in 'em, standing under the big spruces, and everything as neat as a pin.

Everyone thinks he's plumb crazy now, even if they

didn't when he said Eloise Plummer was as beautiful as the morning star. But you can't tell. He's getting money every month from his uncle in Cincinnati to improve the place. He's sent the uncle a photo of it and it must look good back in Cincinnati, where you can't see the surrounding country.

Maybe Herman merely wants to lead a quiet life with the German poets, and has thought up something to make the uncle come through. On the other hand, mebbe he's a spy. Of course he's got a brain. He's either kidding the uncle, or else Wagner's Sylvan Glen now covers a concrete gun foundation.

In either case he's due for harsh words some day—either from the uncle when he finds there ain't any roadhouse patrons for twenty miles round, or from the German War Office when they find out there ain't even anything to shoot at.

The lady paused; then remarked that, even at a church sociable, Uncle Henry's idee of wine would probably make trouble to a police extent. Here it had made her talkative long after bedtime, and she hadn't yet found out just how few dollars stood between her and the poorhouse.

I allowed her to sort papers for a moment. As she scanned them under drawn brows beside a lamp that was dimming, she again rumbled into song. She now sang: "What fierce diseases wait around to hurry mortals home!" It is, musically, the crudest sort of thing. And it clashed with my mood; for I now wished to know how Herman had revealed Prussian guile by his manner of leaving Reno. Only after another verse of the hymn could I be told. It seems worth setting down here:

Well, Herman is working on a sheep ranch out of

Reno, as I'm telling you, and has trouble with a fellow outcast named Manuel Romares. Herman was vague about what started the trouble, except that they didn't understand each other's talk very well and one of 'em thought the other was making fun of him. Anyway, it resulted in a brutal fist affray, greatly to Herman's surprise. He had supposed that no man, Mexican or otherwise, would dare to attack a German single-handed, because he would of heard all about Germans being invincible, that nation having licked two nations —Serbia and Belgium—at once.

So, not suspecting any such cowardly attack, Herman was took unprepared by Manuel Romares, who did a lot of things to him in the way of ruthless devastation. Furthermore, Herman was clear-minded enough to see that Manuel could do these things to him any time he wanted to. In that coarse kind of fighting with the fists he was Herman's superior. So Herman drawed off and planned a strategic coop.

First thing he done was to make a peace offer, at which the trouble should be discussed on a fair basis to both sides. Manuel not being one to nurse a grudge after he'd licked a man in jig time, and being of a sunny nature anyway, I judge, met him halfway. Then, at this peace conference, Herman acted much unlike a German, if he was honest. He said he had been all to blame in this disturbance and his conscience hurt him; so he couldn't rest till he had paid Manuel an indemnity.

Manuel is tickled and says what does Herman think of paying him? Herman shows up his month's pay and says how would it suit Manuel if they go in to Reno that night and spend every cent of this money in all the lovely ways which could be thought up by a Mexican sheep herder that had just come in from a six weeks'

cross-country tour with two thousand of the horrible animals.

Manuel wanted to kiss Herman. Herman says he did cry large tears of gladness. And they started for town.

So they got to Reno, and did not proceed to the Public Library, or the Metallurgical Institute, or the Historical Museum. They proceeded to the Railroad Exchange Saloon, where they loitered and loitered and loitered before the bar, at Herman's expense, telling how much they thought of each other and eating of salt fish from time to time, which is intended by the proprietor to make even sheep herders more thirsty than normal.

Herman sipped only a little beer; but Manuel thought of many new beverages that had heretofore been beyond his humble purse, and every new one he took made him think of another new one. It was a grand moment for Manuel—having anything he could think of set before him in this beautiful café or saloon, crowded with other men who were also having grand moments.

After a while Herman says to Manuel to come outside, because he wants to tell him something good he has thought of. So he leads him outside by an arm and can hardly tell what he has to say because it's so funny he has to laugh when he thinks of it. They go up an alley where they won't be overheard, and Herman at last manages to keep his laughter down long enough to tell it. It's a comical antic he wants Manuel to commit.

Manuel don't get the idea, at first, but Herman laughs so hard that at last Manuel thinks it's just got to be funny and pretty soon he's laughing at it as hard as Herman is.

So they go back to the saloon to do this funny thing, which is to be a joke on the big crowd of men in there. Herman says he won't be able to do it good himself,

because he's got a bad cold and can't yell loud; but Manuel's voice is getting better with every new drink. Manuel is just busting with mirth, thinking of this good joke he's going to play on the Americans.

They have one more drink, Manuel taking peach brandy with honey, which Herman says costs thirty cents; then he looks over the men standing there and he yells good and loud:

"To hell with the President! Hurrah for the Kaiser!"

You know, when Herman told me that, I wondered right off if he hadn't been educated in some school for German secret agents. Didn't it show guile of their kind? I'll never be amazed if he does turn out to be a spy that's simply went wrong on detail.

Of course he was safe out of town long before Manuel limped from the hospital looking for him with a knife. And yet Herman seemed so silly! First thing when he got on the place he wanted to know where the engine was that pumped the windmill.

Furthermore, if you ask me, that there wine won't be made safe for democracy until Uncle Henry has been years and years laid away to rest.

XI

CURLS

MA PETTENGILL, long morose, for months made hostile of mood by the shortage of help, now bubbled with a strange vivacity. At her desk in the Arrowhead living room she cheerfully sorted a jumble of befigured sheets and proclaimed to one and all that the Arrowhead ranch was once more a going concern. She'd thought it was gone, and here it was merely going. She would no longer be compelled to stare ruin in the face till it actually got embarrassed and had to look the other way. And it was the swift doings of this here new foreman. He'd not only got us going again but had put us on a military basis. And at that he was nothing but a poor old wreck of a veteran from the trenches, aged all of twenty-one, shot to pieces, gassed, shell-shocked, trench feeted and fevered, and darned bad with nervous dyspepsia into the bargain.

Thus described, the bargain seemed to me to be a poor one, for I had not yet viewed this decrepit newcomer or been refreshed with tales of his prowess. But Ma Pettengill knows men, and positively will not bubble except under circumstances that justify it, so I considered the matter worth a question or two.

Very well then! What about this mere shattered bit of flotsam from the world welter? How could so misused a remnant cope with the manifold cares of the long-harried Arrowhead ranch?

Why, he just plain coped, that was all. He might

be mere shattered flotsam, but you bet he was still some little coper, take her word for that! Matter of fact, though, he didn't aim to hold the job for long. Only until this here smarty of a medical officer, that turned him down from going back to the trenches, was retired to private life again. This here new foreman had to be on the ground when this puppet got out of his uniform and so could be handled proper by the right party without incurring twenty years in Leavenworth. At this brief meeting the unfortunate man would be told politely that he had guessed wrong on the foreman's physical condition, after which the same would be proved to him then and there, leaving him to wish that he hadn't been so arrogant telling parties they was unfit for further service and had better go home and forget all about the war. Yes, sir; he'd be left himself with something to forget that most likely he'd still be remembering vividly when folks had got to wondering what them funny little buttons with "Liberty Loan" on 'em could ever of been used for.

Still, this palsied wreck was with us for a time and had started in that very morning to carry on. He used but few words, but treated 'em rough if they come looking for it. First, they was two I. W. W.'s down to the lower field had struck for three-fifty a day, and had threatened to burn someone's haystacks when it was coldly refused. So one had been took to jail and one to the hospital the minute the flotsam slowed up with 'em. It was a fair enough hospital case for both, but the one for jail could still walk.

Then two other new hands, two of these here demi-cowboys you have to put up with, had kept the bunk house noisy every night with a bitter personal quarrel including loud threats of mutual murder that never seemed to get any further. So the flotsam, after drink-

ing in some of their most venomous eloquence, had lined 'em up and commanded 'em to git busy and fight it out quick. And he had then licked 'em both in a quick and exaggerated manner when they tried to keep on talking it out with him.

It was a sharply etched impression over the ranch, now shared by its owner, that this here invalid flotsam would take darned little nonsense from any one. It was also the owner's own private impression that he had been expelled from the war for rough behaviour on the field of battle and not because of wounds or sickness. Most likely they'd told him the latter because they was afraid to tell him the truth. But that was the real truth; he was too scrappy and wouldn't let the war go on in peace and quiet.

Anyway, she and the Army was both satisfied, so let it go at that. Mebbe after a few more arguments over there, when they'd made a convinced pro-Ally out of Germany, she might get some more shell-wracked jetsams like this one, that would step in without regard for the rules of civilized warfare and make the life of a certain beef-cattle raiser just one long dream of loveliness with pink rose leaves dreening down on her. Mebbe so!

I was charmed indeed to hear the gladsome note from one so long dismal. So I told the woman that the longest war must have its end and that by this time next year she would be refusing to hire good help at forty-five dollars a month and found, in place of the seventy-five she was now lavishing on indolent stragglers.

She said in that happy case she might consent to adorn the cattle business a few decades longer, but for her part she didn't believe wars would end. If it wasn't this war it would be another one, because human beings are undeniably human. As how? Well, I could take

it this way. Say one of these here inventors sets up nights for twenty years inventing a gun that will shoot through a steel plate sixteen inches thick. All right so fur. But the next day another inventor invents a piece of steel seventeen inches thick. And it had to begin all over—just a seesaw. From where she set she couldn't see no end to it. Was she right; or wasn't she? Of course!

But now, further, about compelling little boys to wear long curls till maturity, with the idee of blunting their finer instincts and making hellions of 'em, so's to have some dandy shock troops for the next war—well, she didn't know. Room for argument there.

This seemed reasonable. I didn't know either. It was an entirely new idee, come from nowhere. This was the very first moment I had supposed there could be such an idee. But such is Ma Pettengill. I thought to inquire as to the origin of this novelty; perhaps to have it more fully set forth. But I had not to. Already I saw unrelenting continuance in the woman's quickened eye. There would be, in fact, no stopping her now. So I might as well leave a one-line space right here to avoid using the double and single quotation marks, which are a nuisance to all concerned. I will merely say that Ma Pettengill spoke in part as follows, and at no time during the interview said modestly that she would prefer not to have her name mentioned.

Mind you, I don't say war's a good thing, even for them that come out of it. Of course you can read stories about how good it is in improving the character. I've read pretty ones in these here sentimental magazines that get close to the great heart of the people once a month; stories about how the town tough boy, that robs his gray-haired mother of her wash money to play

pool with, goes into war's purifying flames and comes out a man, having rescued Marshal Fotch from a shell hole under fire and got the thanks of the French nation and his home-town paper. Now he don't hang round the pool parlour any more, running down fifteen balls from the break, but shuns his low companions, never touches a cue again, marries the mayor's daughter and becomes the regular Democratic candidate for county recorder.

These stories may be true. I don't know. Only these same magazines print stories that have a brave fireman in the picture carrying a fainted girl down his ladder through the flames, and if you believed them you'd also believe they had to set a tenement house on fire every time a fireman wants to get married. And that don't stand to reason. Mebbe the other stories don't either.

But what about the other side of these same stories? What about the village good boy that goes through war's purifying flame and comes back home to be the town tough? Ain't it time someone showed up the moral ravages war commits on our best young men?

Me? I just had a talk lately with a widowed mother down to Red Gap and what this beastly war has done to her oldest boy—well, if she could of looked ahead she would of let the world go right on being unsafe even for Republicans. She poured her heart out to me. She is Mrs. Arline Plunkett, one of the sweetest, gentlest mothers that ever guarded a son from every evil influence. And then to see it all go whoosh! The son's name was Shelley Plunkett, or it was until he went out into the world to make a name for himself. He is now largely known as Bugs Plunkett. I leave it to you if a nice mother would relish having her boy make that name for himself. And after all the pains she'd took

with his moral development from the cradle up—till he run away from home on account of his curls!

Arline had been left well-off by her husband, who was president of the Drovers' Trust Company, and her home was about the most refined home in Red Gap, having full bookcases and pictures of foreign Catholic churches—though Arline is a Presbyterian—and metal statues of antique persons, male and female, and many articles of adornment that can't be had for the ordinary trading stamps. She lived, of course, only for her two boys, Shelley and Keats. Keats being an infant didn't require much living for, but Shelley was old enough to need a lot of it.

He was eight years old when I first seen him, with long golden curls to his shoulders and lace on his velvet pants. He came in when I was calling on his ma and acted the perfect little gentleman. He was so quiet and grown-up he made me feel right awkward. He had the face of a half-growed angel framed in these yellow curls, and his manners was them of Sir Galahad that he read stories about. He was very entertaining this day. His mother had him show me a portrait of himself and curls that had been printed in a magazine devoted to mothers and watermelon-rind pickles, and so forth, and he also brought me the new book his pastor had presented him with on his eighth birthday.

It was a lovely bound book, having a story about a sheepman that had a hundred head out on the range and lost one and left the other ninety-nine unprotected from the coyotes and went out into the brush looking for the lost one, which is about the brains of the average sheepman; but it was a pretty book, and little Shelley told me prettily all about the story, and showed me how his dear pastor had wrote in it for him. He had wrote: "To Shelley Vane Plunkett, who to the distinction of his

name unites a noble and elevated nature." I wonder if Bugs Plunkett ever looks at that writing now and blushes for his lost angel face? Anyway, I thought this day that he was the loveliest, purest child in the world, with his delicate beauty and sweet little voice and perfect manners, all set off by the golden curls.

A couple days later I was going through that same street and when I turned a corner next to the Plunkett house, here was little Shelley addressing a large red-faced man on the back of an ice wagon that had stopped there. It was some shock to my first notions of the angel child. I gathered with no trouble whatever that the party on the ice wagon had so far forgot his own manners as to call little Shelley a sissy. It was a good three-to-one bet he was now sorry he spoke. Little Shelley was using language beyond his years and words that had never been taught him by his lady mother. He handled them words like they was his slaves. Three or four other parties stopped to listen without seeming to. I have heard much in my time. I have even been forced to hear Jeff Tuttle pack a mule that preferred not to be packed. And little Shelley was informing, even to me. He never hesitated for a word and was quick and finished with the syllables.

The ice-wagon man was peeved, as he had a right to be, and may of been going to talk back, but when he saw the rest of us getting Shelley he yelled to the man in the front to drive on. It was too late, quick as he went, to save the fair repute of himself and family, if Shelley's words was to be took seriously. Shelley had invaded the most sacred relationship and pretended to bare a hideous scandal. Also the iceman himself couldn't possibly of done half the things Shelley hotly urged him to do.

Us people that had seemed to linger walked right on,

not meeting each other's eye, and Shelley again become the angel child, turning in at his gate and walking up the path in a decorous manner with his schoolbooks under his arm. I first wondered if I shouldn't go warn Arline that her child had picked up some words that would get him nowhere at all with his doting pastor. Little could the fond woman dream, when she tucked him in after his prayers at night, that talk such as this could come from his sweet young lips. How much mothers think they know of their sons and how darned little they do know! But I decided to keep out of it, remembering that no mother in the world's history had ever thanked a person for anything but praise of her children.

Still, I couldn't help but worry about Shelley's future, both here and hereafter. But I talked to other people about it and learned that he was already known as a public character to everyone but his own dear mother. It was these here curls that got him attacked on every hand by young and old, and his natural vigour of mind had built him up a line of repartee that was downright blistering when he had time to stop and recite it all. Even mule skinners would drive blocks out of their way just to hear little Shelley's words when someone called him sissy or girl-boy.

It seems Shelley never took any of these troubles to his mother, because he was right manly and he regarded curls as a natural infirmity that couldn't be helped and that his poor ma shouldn't be blamed for. He'd always had curls, just as other unfortunates had been disfigured or maimed from birth, so he'd took it as a cross the Lord had give him to bear. And he was willing to bear it in silence if folks would just let him alone. Otherwise, not. Oh, most surely not!

I kind of kept watch on Shelley's mad career after

that. It was mad most of the time. He had already begun to fight as well as to use language, and by the time he was ten he was a very nasty scrapper. And ready—it soon got so that only boys new-come to town would taunt him about his golden locks. And unless they was too much out of Shelley's class he made believers of 'em swiftly. From ten to twelve he must of had at least one good fight a day, what with the new ones and the old ones that still couldn't believe a boy in velvet pants with curls on his shoulders could really put it over on 'em. His mother believed his clothes was tore and his face bunged up now and then in mere boyish sports, and begged him not to engage in such rough games with his childish playmates. And Shelley, the little man, let her talk on, still believing he was like little Paul McNamara, that had a crooked foot. He wasn't going to shame his mother as well as himself.

I don't know just how Shelley ever got his big illumination that curls was not a curse put on him by his Maker. But he certainly did get it when he was round twelve. After two years of finish fights he suddenly found out that curls is optional, or a boy's own fault, if not his mother's, and that they may be cured by a simple and painless operation. He'd come to the observing age. They say he'd stand in front of Henry Lehman's barber shop every chance he'd get, watching the happy men getting their hair cut. And he put two and two together.

Then he went straight to his mother and told her all about his wonderful and beautiful discovery. He was awful joyous about it. He said you only had to go to Mr. Lehman's barber shop with thirty-five cents, and the kind Mr. Lehman would cut the horrible things off and make him look like other boys, so please let him have the thirty-five.

Then Shelley got a great shock. It was that his mother wanted him to wear them things to please her. She burst into tears and said the mere thought of her darling being robbed of his crowning glory by that nasty old Henry Lehman or any one else was breaking her heart, and how could he be so cruel as to suggest it?

The poor boy must of been quite a bit puzzled. Here was a way out of something he had thought was incurable, and now his mother that loved him burst into tears at the thought of it. So he put it out of his mind. He couldn't hurt his mother, and if cutting off his disgrace was going to hurt her he'd have to go on wearing it.

Shelley was getting lanky now, with big joints and calf knees showing below his velvet pants; and he was making great headway, I want to tell you, in what seemed to be his chosen profession of pugilism. He took to going out of his class, taking on boys two or three years older. I never had the rare pleasure of seeing him in action, but it was mere lack of enterprise on my part. Before he found out that curls could be relieved by a barber he had merely took such fights as come to him. But now he went out of his way looking for 'em, and would start the action himself.

It got so that boys used to travel in bands—them that had criticized his appearance so he'd hear it—but he'd lie in wait for stragglers that was left behind by the convoy, and it would be the same old sad story. You can know what it meant when I tell you that the last year Shelley went to school they say he could come onto the playground with his long yellow curls floating in the breeze, and not a word would be heard from the fifty boys that might be there.

And so it went till he was thirteen. One succession of fights and a growing collection of words that would of

give his fond pastor something to think about. Of course word of the fights would get to Shelley's ma from mothers whose little ones he had ravaged, but she just simply didn't believe it. You know a woman can really not believe anything she don't wish to. You couldn't tell that lady that her little boy with the angel face and soft voice would attack another boy unless the other boy begun it. And if the other boy did begin it it was because he envied Shelley his glorious curls. Arline was certainly an expert in the male psychology, as they call it.

But at thirteen Shelley was losing a lot of the angel out of his face. His life of battle had told on him, I guess. But he was still obedient and carried the cross for his mother's sake. Poor thing! He'd formed the habit of obedience and never once suspicioned that a woman had no right to impose on him just because she was his mother. Shelley just took to fighting a little quicker. He wouldn't wait for words always. Sometimes mere looks of disgust would start him.

Then, when he got to near fourteen, still with the beautiful curls, he begun to get a lovely golden down on his face; and the face hadn't hardly a trace of angel left in it. The horrible truth was that Shelley not only needed a haircut but a shave. And one day, goaded by certain taunts, he told his mother this in a suddenly bass voice. It must of startled Arline, having this roar come out of her child when his little voice had always been sweet and high. So she burst into some more tears and Shelley asked her forgiveness, and pretty soon she was curling his hair again. I guess he knew right then it was for the last time on earth, but nothing warned the mother.

These new taunts that had finally made a man of Shelley was no taunts from boys, which he could handle

easy, but the taunts of heedless girls, who naturally loathed a boy with curls even more than male humans of any age loathe him; and girls can be a lot tauntier when they start out to. Well, Shelley couldn't lick girls, and he had reached an age when their taunts cut into his hide like whiplashes, so he knew right well he had to do something desperate.

Then he went out and run away from the refining influences of his beautiful home. He took to the hills and landed way up on the north fork of the Kulanche where Liver-eating Johnson has a sheep ranch. Liver-eating, who is an unsavory character himself, had once heard Shelley address a small group of critics in front of the post office, and had wanted to adopt him right there. He still cherished the fondest memories of Shelley's flow of language, so he was tickled to death to have him drop along and stop, seeing that though but a lad in years he was a man and brother in speech, even if he did look like a brother that had started out to be a sister and got mixed.

Liver-eating took him in and fed him and cut his hair with a pair of sheep shears. It was a more or less rough job, because shearing sheep does not make a man a good human barber by any means. But Shelley looked at his head in the glass and said it was the most beautiful haircut in the world. Fussy people might criticize it here and there, but they could never say it hadn't really been cut.

He was so grateful to Liver-eating that he promised to stay with him always and become a sheep herder. And he did hide out there several months till his anguished mother found out where he was. After having every pond dragged and every bit of woods searched for her boy's body she had believed he'd been carried off by kidnappers on account of his heavenly beauty, and

she'd probably have to give ten thousand dollars for his release. She was still looking for a letter from these fiends when she learned about his being with Liver-eating Johnson and that this wretch had committed sacrilege on him.

It was a harsh blow to know that her pet had consorted with such a person, who was not only a sheepman but had earned his nickname in a way that our best people thought not nice. He'd gone home one day years ago and found his favourite horse had been took by an Injun. Being a simple-mannered man of few words, he just said that by sundown to-morrow he would of et the liver of the Injun that done the stealing. I don't know, personally, what happened, except that he did come back the next night with his horse. Anyway no one ever begrudged him his title after that. And here was Shelley Vane Plunkett, who had been carefully raised on fruits and cereals, taking up with such a nauseous character as a social equal.

Arline had the sheriff out at once for her darling, but Shelley got word and beat it farther. He finally got to Seattle, where he found various jobs, and kept his mother guessing for three years. He was afraid she'd make him start the curls again if he come home. But finally, when he was eighteen, he did come, on her solemn promise to behave. But he was no longer the angel-faced darling that had left, and he still expected at least one fight a day, though no longer wearing what would cause fights. He'd formed the habit and just couldn't leave off. A body could hardly look at him without starting something unpleasant. He was round like a barrel now, and tough and quick, and when anything did happen to be started he was the one that finished it. Also, he'd have his hair cut close every five or six days. He always looked like a prisoner that had

started to let it grow about a week before he left the institution. Shelley was taking no chances, and he used to get a strange, glittering look in his eye when he regarded little Keats, his baby brother, who was now coming on with golden curls just as beautiful as Shelley's had ever been. But he done nothing sinister.

In time he might of settled down and become a useful citizen, but right then the war broke out, so no more citizen stuff for Shelley. It was almost too good to be true that he could go to a country where fighting was legal; not only that, but they'd give him board and lodging and a little spending money for doing the only thing he'd ever learned to do well. It sure looked like heaven. So off he went to Canada and enlisted and got sent across and had three years of perfect bliss, getting changed over to our Army when we finally got unneutral so you could tell it.

Of course his mother was almost more anguished about his going to war than about having his curls fixed with the sheep shears. She said even if he wasn't shot he would be sure to contract light habits in France, consisting of native wine and dancing, and so forth, and she hoped at least he could be a drummer boy or something safe.

But Shelley never had a safe moment, I guess. No such thing as a quiet sector where he was. He fought at the Front, and then he'd fight at hospitals every time he got took back there for being shot up. He was almost too scrappy even for that war. He was usually too busy to write, but we got plenteous reports of his adventures from other men, these adventures always going hard with whatever Germans got in his way. And I bet his mother never dreamed that his being such a demon fighter was all due to her keeping him in curls

so long, where he got the habit and come to love it for its own sake.

Anyway, he fought and fought and had everything happen to him that German science had discovered was useful to exterminate the lesser races, and it finally begun to tell on him, hardened as he was by fighting from the cradle up, as you might say.

It was a glad day for Arline when she got word that he was a broken-down invalid and had landed at an Atlantic Ocean port on his way home. She got arrow-root gruel and jelly and medicinal delicacies and cushions, and looked forward to a life of nursing. She hoped that in the years to come she could coax the glow of health back to his wan cheeks. And I wouldn't put it past her—mebbe she hoped she could get him to let the golden hair grow again, just long enough to make him interesting as he lay coughing on his couch.

And Shelley come home, but his idee of being an invalid wasn't anything like his mother's. He looked stout as a horse, and merely wished to rest up for a couple weeks before getting some other kind of action suited to his peculiar talents. And worse, he wasn't Shelley Vane Plunkett—he was Bugs Plunkett; and his mother's heart broke again. He was shaved like a convict and thicker through than ever, and full of rich outdoor words about what he would do to this so-and-so medical officer for not letting him back into the scrap. Yes, sir; that man is going to suffer casualties right up to the limit the minute he gets out of his uniform—and him thinking the world is at peace once more! Sure, Shelley had been shot through the lungs a couple of times, and one leg had been considerably altered from the original plan, but he had claimed he was a better scrapper than ever before and had offered to prove it to

this medical officer right then and there if it could be done quiet. But this fair offer had been rejected.

So here he'd come back, not any kind of a first-class invalid that would be nice to nurse, but as Bugs Plunkett! No sooner did he get to town than letters and postal cards begun to come addressed to Mr. Bugs Plunkett or mebbe B. Plunkett, Esquire; and the cards would be from his old pals in the trenches, many of whom had worse names, even, than Shelley had made for himself.

Also the sick warrior turned down flat the arrowroot gruel and Irish-moss custard and wine jelly and pale broth. He had to have the same coarse food that is et by common working people who have had no home advantages, including meat, which is an animal poison and corrupts the finer instincts of man by reducing him to the level of the brutes. So Arline Plunkett says. Shelley had it, though, ordering it in a bass voice that made the statuary teeter. Steak was cooked in the Plunkett home for the first time since it had been erected, notwithstanding the horrible example it set to little Keats, who still had golden curls as lovely as Shelley's once had been and was fed on fruits and nuts.

Arline couldn't of had any pleasant time with her wandering boy them three weeks he was there. She suffered intensely over the ignominy of this mail that came to him by the awful name of Bugs, with the gossips in the post office telling it everywhere, so that the boys round the cigar store got to calling him Bugs right out plain. And her son seeming proud of this degradation!

And she couldn't get him to protect himself from drafts by night. He'd insist on having a window wide open, and when she'd sneak back to close it so he wouldn't catch his death of cold he'd get up and court destruc-

tion by hoisting it again. And once when she'd crept in and shut it a second time he threw two shoes through the upper and lower parts so it would always be open. He claimed he done this in his sleep, having got into the habit in the trenches when he'd come in from a long march and someone would close all the windows. But Arline said that this only showed that war had made him a rowdy, even in his sleep—and out of the gentlest-mannered boy that ever wore velvet garments and had a cinch on every prize in the Sunday school; though she did not use coarse words like that. She told me herself it was time we got this other side of what war did to gently nurtured youths that had never soiled their lips with an oath in their lives until they went into war's hell. She said just that!

Also Shelley had contracted the vicious habit of smoking, which was all a body would want to know about war. She said he'd have his breakfast in bed, including whole slices of ham, which comes from the most loathsome of all animals, and would then lie and smoke the Lord Byron five-cent cigar, often burning holes in the covers, which he said was another old trench habit—and that showed what war done to the untainted human soil. Also while smoking in bed he would tell little Keats things no innocent child should hear, about how fine it feels to deflate Germans with a good bayonet. She had never esteemed Lord Byron as a poet, and these cigars, she assures me, was perfectly dreadful in a refined home, where they could be detected even in the basement.

Little Keats was now thirteen, with big joints and calf knees showing under the velvet pants, and I guess his curls was all that persuaded his mother to live, what with Shelley having gone to the bad and made a name for himself like Bugs. But little Keats had fell for his

brother, and spent all the time he could with him listening to unpretty stories of Germans that had been fixed up proper the way the good Lord meant 'em to be.

After he'd been home a couple weeks or more Shelley begun to notice little Keats more closely. He looked so much like Shelley had at that age and had the same set-on manner in the house that Shelley got suspicious he was leading the same double life he had once led himself.

He asked his mother when she was going to take Keats to a barber, and his mother burst into tears in the old familiar way, so he said no more to her. But that afternoon he took little Keats out for a stroll and closely watched his manner toward some boys they passed. They went on downtown and Shelley stepped into the Owl cigar store to get a Lord Byron. When he come out little Keats was just finishing up a remark to another boy. It had the familiar ring to Shelley and was piquant and engaging even after three years in the trenches, where talk is some free. Keats still had the angel face, but had learned surprisingly of old English words.

Then Shelley says to him: "Say, kid, do you like your curls?" And little Keats says very warmly and almost shedding tears: "They're simply hell!"

"I knew it," says Shelley. "Have many fights?"

"Not so many as I used to," says Keats.

"I knew that, too," says Shelley. "Now, then, you come right along with me."

So he marches Keats and curls down to Henry Lehman's and says: "Give this poor kid a close haircut."

And Henry Lehman won't do it. He says that Mrs. Plunkett, the time of the scandal about Shelley, had warned every barber in town that she would have the law on 'em if they ever harmed a hair on the head of a child of hers; and he was a law-abiding citizen. He

didn't deny that the boy needed a haircut the worst way in the world, but at his time of life he wasn't going to become an outlaw.

Keats had nearly broke down at this. But Shelley says: "All right; come on over to the other place."

So they go over to Katterson Lee, the coloured barber, and Katterson tells 'em the same story. He admits the boy needs a haircut till it amounts to an outrage, but he's had his plain warning from Shelley's ma, and he ain't going to get mixed up with no lawsuit in a town where he's known to one and all as being respectable.

Shelley then threatened him with bodily harm if he didn't cut that hair off quick, and Katterson was right afraid of the returned soldier, that had fixed so many Germans right, but he was more afraid of the law, so he got down on his knees to Shelley and begged for his life.

Little Keats was now blubbering, thinking he wasn't going to be shut of his disgrace after all, but Shelley says: "All right, kid; I'll stand by you. I'll do it myself. Get into that chair!"

Of course Katterson couldn't prevent that, so Keats got sunny again and climbed into the chair, and Shelley grabbed a pair of shears and made a sure-nuff boy of him. He got the curls off all right, but when it come to trimming up he found he couldn't do a smooth job, and Katterson wasn't there to give him any hints, having run from his shop at the beginning of the crime so he would have a good alibi when hauled into court. So Shelley finally took up a pair of clippers, and having learned to clip mules he soon had little Keats' whole scalp laid bare. It must of been a glorious sight. They both gloated over it a long time.

Then Keats says: "Now you come with me and we'll show it to mamma!" But Shelley says: "Not me! I

have to draw the line somewhere. I shall be far away from here to-night. I am not afraid of enemy soldiers, for I've been up against them too often. But there are worse things than death, so you'll have to face mamma alone. You can tell her I did it, but I will not be there to hear you. So good-bye and God help you!" And Shelley retired to a position less exposed.

That was an awful day for the Plunkett home, because little Keats, being left to his own resources, tried to use his brain. First he gathered up the long shining curls and wrapped 'em in a newspaper. Then he went out and found Artie Bartell, who is a kind of a harmless halfwit that just walks the streets and will do anything whatever if told, being anxious to please. Keats gives Artie a dime to take the curls up to his dear mother and tell her that her little boy has been run over by a freight engine down to the station and these here curls was all that could be saved of him.

Then he hurries home the back way and watches, and pretty soon he sees some neighbours come rushing to the house when they hear his mother scream, so then he knows everything is all right. He waits a minute or two, then marches in with his hat off. His mother actually don't know him at first, on account of his naked skull, but she soon sees it must be he, little Keats, and then has hysterics because she thinks the freight engine has clipped him this way. And of course there was more hysterics when she learned the terrible truth of his brother's infamy. I guess Shelley had been wise all right to keep off the place at that time, soldier or no soldier. But that's neither here nor there.

The point is that little Keats may now be saved to a life of usefulness and not be hanged for murder, thanks to his brother's brave action. Of course Bugs himself is set in his ways, and will adorn only positions of a

certain kind. He's fine here, for instance, just at this time when I got to hire all kinds that need a firm hand—and Bugs has two.

Sure, it was him took the job of foreman here yesterday. We had quite a little talk about things when he come. He told me how he released his little brother from shame. He said he wouldn't of done such a radical thing except that peace is now coming on and the world will no longer need such fighting devils as curls will make of a boy if let to stay long enough.

"Keats might have turned out even worse than I did," he says, "but if there wasn't going to be any way where he could do it legally, what was the use? He'd probably sometime have killed a boy that called him Goldilocks, and then the law might have made it unpleasant for him. I thought it was only fair to give him a chance to live peaceful. Of course in my own case mamma acted for the best without knowing it. We needed fighters, and I wouldn't have been anything at all like a fighter if she hadn't made me wear those curls till my whiskers began to show above the surface. In fact, I'm pretty sure I was a born coward, but those golden strands took all that out of me. I had to fight.

"And see what it did for me in the Army. I don't want to talk about myself, but I made a good average fighter and I would have been there to the last if I'd had my rights. And I simply owe it all to my dear mother. You might say she made me the man I am. I wouldn't ever have been tough if she'd cut my hair humanely from six years on. I certainly hope Keats hasn't gone too long. One of us in a family is enough."

That's the way Bugs talks, and it sounds right sensible. What I say now is, the idee had ought to be took up by the War Department at Washington, D. C. Let 'em pass a law that one boy out of, say, twenty-five has

got to wear curls till his voice changes. By that time, going round in this here scenic investiture, as you might say, he will be a demon. In peace times it may add to our crimes of violence, but look what it will be when another war comes. We'll have the finest line of shock troops the world has ever produced, fit and anxious to fight, having led an embittered existence long enough to make it permanent. No line would ever stand against a charge of them devils. They would be a great national asset and might save the country while we was getting ready to begin to prepare a couple months after war was declared on us.

Still I don't suppose it will be took up, and I ain't got time to go down and preach it to Congress personally.

And now let me tell you one thing: I'm going to sleep to-night without a care on my mind for the first time in a year. This here Bugs unites to the distinction of his name a quick and handy nature, and my busiest troubles are over.

THE END

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